Heart Problems and World Issues

JAMES ALLEN GEISSINGER

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HEART PROBLEMS AND WORLD ISSUES

A Study of the Book of Revelation.

BY

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BY WAY OF PREFACE.

It will be apparent at once to the reader that the present volume does not make claim to a place among the commentaries on the Book of Revelation. It is rather a popular interpretation of the Book with the purpose of setting forth its deeper spiritual import.

More than ten years ago the author began a serious study of the Book, seeking to make use of the best available helps and always to keep an open mind. He can now recall but two prepossessions concerning the Book. On the one hand was the opinion that the Book must be

beyond deciphering in any way at all satisfying, and that possibly because the key had been lost. Else why such diversity of opinion concerning the Book not only among scholars, but among laymen. On the other hand was the feeling that, since the Book had been placed at the close of the sacred canon, it must have been considered by the Church as the Climax of The Writings. Hence it would not only throw light upon what had preceded, but also upon "things to come."

What was his surprise to find the Book a delight to the eyes and pleasant to the taste! Its glorious pictures he holds among his most precious mental possessions. Its appeal has not lost its

power with the years. He has kept to the study of it not professionally, but because of the fascination it has had for him and for the spiritual value he has found in it. At the same time his study of the Book has been systematic and prayerful, for he has realized that this is not only an exceedingly interesting human document, but that here, as certainly as anywhere, the voice of the Divine Wisdom, of the Divine Grace, of the Divine Love, speaks to the human heart upon the deep problems and the great issues.

The several studies making up this volume and constituting one study of the Book were given individually and at varying intervals of time to widely separated audiences until recently, when they

were gathered together and given as a series before the Maclay School of Theology of the University of Southern California. They are now given to the larger public of readers with but one desire, that they may possibly induce some one to read the Book, or possibly help some one who is reading the Book to a better understanding of the same.

JAMES ALLEN GEISSINGER.

Los Angeles, California,
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THE BOOK.

IN estimating the Apocalypse the thought lies near at hand that its value is not to be measured by the extent of its dogmatic content. There is a healthful tonic in its religious intensity. It supplies a great store of riches to the religious imagination. It dignifies the Christian warfare as part of a great drama that is being led on to a transcendently glorious issue. Well has it been called the epic of Christian hope. Many of its outlooks have perennial charm, and many of its words descend generation after generation like strains of celestial music upon the troubled hearts of men.—*Henry C. Sheldon in "New Testament Theology," p. 170.*

THE BOOK.

The Book of Revelation can not be measured by any rule of thumb. Men have tried that. They have made mathematical calculations as to its symbols and wise guesses at its puzzles. But it is not a book of rebuses and cryptograms. If we were to strike out all it has to say about mystic numbers and seals and vials and trumpets, there would still be left an amazing residuum of spiritual meaning. For, primarily, the Book is a book of the heart, for the heart.[1] It is a book that deals with heart problems and world issues.[2] In it a great faith speaks. A faith that is assured not

[1] 2: 2, 2: 13, 5: 4-5, 7: 14-17, etc. [2] Chapters 2, 3, 17, and 18.

simply that Righteousness shall triumph, but that Righteousness does triumph.[3] The very first vision of the Book shows us God as a Divine Presence in His world, for the Throne in heaven does not come first.[4] First comes the Risen and Glorified Christ, keeping watch above His own, He, who carries the chain of stars in His hand.[5]

We listen as we read the Book, and we hear the booming of the sea—the sea that stood to the Seer as a symbol of all the forces thundering against the Kingdom, the varied spiritual antagonisms—the sea that beat and pounded on Patmos with deafening tumult, and was soon to be no more;[6] yet above the noise of the sea we hear the trumpets of the Lord[7] as with His Church He rides forth con-

[3] 19: 6. [4] 1: 10-20. [5] 1: 20. [6] 21: 1; also 20: 13, 18: 17, 13: 1, 10: 2. [7] 8: 6, 7, 8, 10, 12; 9: 1, 13, 15.

quering and to conquer;[8] and above the trumpets[9] we hear the heavenly voices shouting, "Hallelujah, the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth;"[10] until at last, above all the jangling sounds of earth, we hear the mighty hallelujah chorus. The Book is full of music. That is not a bit of fancy which traces the ascent of the Book from solo, through quartets, angel choruses, and martyr choruses, to the grand Hallelujah Chorus, in which all the redeemed with all the heavenly hosts and all the harps and viols and trumpets and cymbals are heard. For the Book speaks to us of the time when strifes and wars and discords shall be no more.

[8] 19: 11-16. [9] 11: 15-19. [10] 19: 1-8.
Mr. S. D. Gordon, in his "Quiet Talks with World Winners," p. 148, notes the musical effects in the Book: Solo, 1: 5, 6; Quartet, 4: 8; Sextuple Quartet, 4: 9-11, 5: 8-10; Angel Chorus, 5: 11-12; Creation Chorus, 5: 13; Martyr Chorus, 7: 9-12; Chorus of Pure Ones, 14: 1-5; Victors' Chorus, 15: 2-4; Hallelujah Chorus, 19: 1-18.

. . . The background of the Book is the stone quarries of Patmos,[11] where John labored through the day that he might write through the night to the Church. But in the foreground rise the shining walls of the City with its open-gates, each one a pearl![12] The Book is full of magnificent pictures, of sublime outlooks. No other book equals it in the splendor and gorgeousness and spiritual meaning of its pictures. The Seer not only speaks of but makes you see the Dragon[13] and the Beast[14] and the Harlot[15] and also the Lord of Glory[16] and the White Throne[17] and the Heavenly Hosts[18] and the Bride![19] How much we of this day need the point of view of the Exile! How much heartier our faith would be if we could at least now and

[11] See chapter on "Seer." [12] 21: 10-27; 21: 21. [13] 12: 1-9. [14] 13: 1-10. [15] 17: 3-6. [16] Chapters 4 and 5. [17] 20: 11-15. [18] 19: 11-16. [19] 21: 9.

then see life and things under the aspect of eternity! The Book has over it the shadow of the Roman Empire—even the shadow of the Beast, of the Dragon, of sin. But, more, it has upon it the Glory of God! It is a book of unveiling; and sin is unveiled in it and is disclosed in all of its hideousness, as it is in Dante. Yet the Book speaks not of sin, of the futility of sin, but rather it reveals the whole world as lying in the Glory of God, Redeeming Grace! for the central figure of the Book is the Slain Lamb enthroned,[20] which is the Seer's way of unveiling the Holy Love back of all things, over all things. . . . The perspective of the Book is infinite. As we look back we see a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world;[21] and then we walk with the Seer and his angelic guides

[20] 5: 6. [21] 13: 8.

down long vistas, through which flashes the Glory of God, across centuries of civilization, groaning and struggling and toiling towards the light, until we see at the last the land afar off where men and women are whose robes have been washed in the Blood of the Lamb,[22] on whose bosoms, in whose hearts, is the Cross.

I trust we shall get the Exile's perspective as we go forward in our reading; that we shall hear not simply the undertone, but the mighty overtone of triumph and hope that sounds throughout the Book; that we shall rise to something of the greatness and the serenity of the Seer's faith in the presence of a Holy Love in the World.

* * * * * * *

The Book has often been unfortunate in its friends, for, instead of being set

[22] 21: 24-27.

forth as a great drama, a great poem, a sublime apocalypse, it has been made to be a chart of dispensations, if not a menagerie of monstrosities, until some wit has said if the Book does not find its reader crack-brained it leaves him so.

It is not strange that the Book has attracted minds of an eccentric type or that it has lent itself readily to the chart-makers and the mechanics of the Kingdom. The Book is realistic; and all realistic literature, Dante, Browning, or whoever the author, is difficult reading. It calls for patience and for the imagination at its best. Some books must be read with the logical faculty in the ascendant, some with the imagination in the ascendant. "Revelation" belongs to the latter class. When spiritual truth is set forth under a symbol, it is so easy for the reader to take the symbol literally.

Sometimes he masters the temptation and gets the meaning. For instance, few readers will have difficulty in seeing that when the Seer pictures Christ as having a sword come out of His mouth he is saying pictorially that by the Word, the Gospel, the foolishness of preaching, Christ is to conquer, the Kingdom is to come. But, as we shall see, it is apparently impossible for some interpreters to read the Book through and consistently escape the snare of literalism. For example, again, it is only a bald literalism that is confronted with the disturbing query, Why did God let the Devil out after he once had him jailed?[23] This difficulty of literalism, or rather the formal characteristic of the Book, its symbolism, will come to fuller treatment as we go forward in our reading. Enough

[23] 20: 1-3 and 20: 7.

to say here that many important passages of the Book will not admit of a literal reading. But if that is so, then it ought to be clear that the literalist has no key for us, for we must interpret consistently. It is unreasonable to read the first chapter symbolically and the twentieth chapter literally and still expect to secure a sane and rational view of the Kingdom and its consummation. The Book is a great picture book[24] from which, if we look steadfastly, we shall see the Glory of God break upon us.

Here it may be well to remark that the Book has its deeper affinities with, say the Fourth Gospel,[25] rather than with

[24] The Book may well be studied in its scenic effects. Note its chief visions: The Golden Candlesticks, the Throne, the Multitude on the Sea of Glass, the Angels with the Bowls, Babylon, the New Jerusalem, etc.

[25] Anderson Scott, "Revelation," p. 45, says the opinion of the Early Church was that whoever wrote the Fourth Gospel wrote the Apocalypse, and adds that this opinion is once more in the ascendant.

Jewish apocalypse. It is true that in its form the Book belongs to the apocalyptic literature, and the Seer apparently made use of Jewish apocalypses. I do not believe that it is possible to understand the Book in its time, setting, and form, to fully appreciate its atmosphere and emphasis, without the help gained from a study of the apocalyptic literature. Hence we do well to be grateful to those scholars who have labored in that field and to make use of their work.

Yet this lead will not take us far. The Seer was more than an apocalyptist. He makes that clear by his handling of his material. And it is foolish for the reader to try to crowd his meaning back to the conventional level. As foolish as to try to reduce the Master's meaning to that of His contemporaries. Poets and prophets use forms, words, symbols after the

manner of their own genius, and the interpreter must seek to follow that genius.

Now, there can be no question but that in the Book of Revelation we find the same type of mind that energized in the Fourth Gospel; the same breadth of view, the same easy grasp of both great and subtle spiritual truths, the same gift of insight, the same moral poignancy, the same self-suppression, the same spirit of awe combined with spiritual audacity. This impression is deepened with continued, open-minded study. It is not merely a personal impression. All students are agreed upon the fact, though its full significance does not seem to be generally felt; for all scholars say either that the same writer has given us both books or else that both books have come from two writers of the same school of

thought. Both the Book of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel belong to the same school of thought. The real significance of this fact is for the interpretation of the Book of Revelation. It ought to be a perpetual protest against any form of literalism and also against any merely apocalyptic conception of the Book.

It is also well to note that the Seer pays little, if any, heed to time sequences. He is, however, acutely sensitive to moral sequences. It is difficult ever to say that this section of the Book belongs after that, and still more difficult to say at what time after. We must be careful, then, about our chronology in reading the Book of Revelation. Nevertheless the Book deals with a specific historical situation. Swete rightly says that in form the Book *is* an Epistle (not

a letter)[26] *containing* an apocalyptic prophecy, but that in spirit and inner purpose it is a pastoral, that is, it sprung out of an actual condition and need. This must be grasped fully by the reader. But the Book deals with eternal problems and values, and is for all time. It can not be understood apart from its time, but its message was not exhausted by its time. Indeed, it is doubtful if any other book in the Canon speaks more directly to our present generation than does this Book.

It will help us to an understanding of the Book and also reveal at once the main emphasis in the present interpretation of the Book if we examine even

[26] Deissmann, "Light from the Ancient East," p. 220, says: "An epistle is an artistic literary form, . . . like the dialogue, the oration, or the drama." Unlike the letter, it is intended for publicity. It differs from the letter as the dialogue from conversation.

hastily its carefully wrought-out structure, for no other book in the Bible shows more artistic feeling or displays a better sense of proportion or a finer gift for massing material than this book. There is nowhere confusion, but part fits in with part, and the whole is a beautiful mosaic or, perhaps more accurately, a series of flaming canvases.

We read, 1: 1-8, that the Book is a revelation of Jesus Christ to His Church given by His angel, and shows "things which must shortly come to pass." "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." As the Book seeks to give such a revelation of Christ as will hearten the Church and send it forward on its great mission, we have set before us at once in verses 4-6

the glorified Christ. The Prelude comes to a climax in verses 7 and 8, which contain the Divine Asseveration. It is true that the time sequences are subordinate in the Book to the moral sequences, but one of the fundamental messages of the Book is given here in the affirmation that shortly a glorious manifestation is to be made. Only let the reader keep in mind the peril of literalism in his attempt to grasp the word "shortly." Thus ends the First Main Division of the Book, the Prelude. (1: 1-8.)

The Second Main Division (1: 9–3: 22) gives a Revelation of Christ's Glory to the Church, and includes the Lord's Day Vision and the Messages to the Churches. I think it best to take the Vision with the Messages, for its meaning is not made clear until the last word of the last letter has been read. An

understanding of this section is of the utmost importance to an understanding of the Book, for in it we see the actual situation the Seer was seeking to meet; and it is only as we grasp the historical setting of the Book that we can hope to get its spiritual import. I do not find myself at all able to agree with Ramsay that the "Apocalypse would be quite complete without the Seven Letters." (Page 37.) On the contrary, without the material of this section a great part of what follows is left without foundation, like a house in midair, for, as Swete says, (CCXVII), "The Apocalypse is cast in the form of a letter" (rather, an epistle) "to certain Christian societies, and it opens with a detailed account of their conditions and circumstances." This fact, which adds immensely to the permanent value of the Book, simply must

be kept in mind constantly if the Book is to be understood at all.

The Third Main Division of the Book ends with chapter eleven. Swete (XXXIX) notes this cleavage and remarks, "Had all our MSS. broken off at 11: 19, and no vestige of the last eleven chapters survived, it is conceivable that the loss might never have been suspected."

Let us look at this section for a moment. In 4: 1 we have a transition clearly marked: "After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me: which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter."

Chapters four and five give the setting, and are manifestly introductory to what follows. At the same time these

chapters serve to give the Church militant, hard-pressed and disheartened, a vision of eternity.

The message which follows is given in the form of seals which are opened—six of them in chapter six. If we read on we find that the seventh seal is opened at 8: 1, "And when he had opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven." Chapter seven is a parenthesis with a double purpose: First, it is a word of comfort to the afflicted Christians; secondly, it prepares the way for the opening of the seventh seal and serves to heighten the effect of what follows.

The seventh seal consists of seven trumpets, which are sounded in close sequence, as we are told in chapters eight and nine.

The seventh trumpet is not sounded until we come to 11: 15. And here, again,

the interlude 10:1–11:14 serves the author well, helping him to make his transition and adding to the effect. Notice—The former interruption or episode helps to emphasize the climactic effect desired in the opening of the seventh seal. The present interruption serves to set the sounding of the last trumpet in most sublime climax.

This tenth chapter is exceedingly important. For instance, verse 11 indicates that the Seer has yet other revelations to receive. It looks forward. For this reason, while Professor Swete is certainly right in emphasizing the marked cleavage in the Book at the end of the eleventh chapter, he is scarcely justified in adding that we would never have missed the remaining chapters had they been lost.

In 11:8, which reads, "And their

dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt where also our Lord was crucified," we seem to have a time clue to the effect that the visions given in the seven seals reveal the judgments of God, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem. It is possible that this portion of the Book was written at a date somewhat earlier than the other portions.

The Fourth Main Division of the Book begins with chapter twelve and ends at the twenty-first verse of the nineteenth chapter (12: 1–19: 21). Here we are given a new outlook on God's judgments. We no longer see the Seven Churches with their particular problems, but the Church at large in the struggle with the World-Empire. The main characters are the Woman and the Dragon, with his minions, the Beast and the False

Prophet; or, as it is often put, Christ and Anti-Christ. We no longer have our attention fastened upon Sodom where "our Lord was crucified," but upon Babylon—"drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (17: 6). This division of the Book gives us God's judgment of condemnation upon the Dominion of the Dragon as embodied in the Roman Empire.

Chapters twelve, thirteen, and fourteen are introductory, giving us the vision of the Woman and the Dragon (12: 1-18), the Beast from the Sea (13: 1-10), and the Vision of the 144,000 (14: 1-20).

Chapters fifteen and sixteen give us the vision of the Vials of Wrath. From 17–19: 10 we have a more detailed account of the doom of the mystic Babylon.

The Fifth Main Division (20: 1-15) gives us the story of the completion of the conquest of Christ in the destruction of the Dragon, while above the field of time rises the Great White Throne—showing that the Lord God Omnipotent still reigneth. This chapter might be included under division four but that the Seer does not think of the struggle as ending with the fall of the Beast. It is difficult to say how long a time view[27] he had, but the text indicates a period of time of indefinite length between the destruction of the Beast and the Dragon, while 19: 11-21 seems to be used to make clear the victory of Christ over the Beast.

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[27] "Even the Apocalypse, which is commonly supposed to portray sudden and dynamic changes, when studied closely, reveals a vast scheme of human history, requiring immense stretches of time for its fulfillment."—*Thomas, "The Coming Presence," p. 13.*

The Sixth Main Division (21: 1–22: 5) contains the vision of the New Jerusalem.

The Epilogue constitutes the Seventh Main Division (22: 6-21).

THE BOOK AND CHRIST.

THE best commentary on the claim that He had come to fulfill the law and the prophets is Hebrews; the most impressive representations of His functions as Redeemer and Judge are to be found in the Apocalypse.—*Fairbairn, "Philosophy of the Christian Religion," p. 475.*

THE BOOK AND CHRIST.

THE Book is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ." However we may construe the grammar of the opening sentence, the purport of the Book is unmistakable. The Book is not a book of "last things," but a book in which the Spirit takes the things of Christ—His person, His work, His grace, His power, His glory—and makes them manifest to us. The Book throws light on many problems of the heart, on great world issues, on many of the movements of the Spirit. It says great things about the Church, about the Kingdom, about righteousness, about Calvary, about the Great White Throne. But it is primarily a revelation of Jesus Christ and the glorious life of light,

peace, liberty, and joy He hath secured for His own by His sacrifice.

Some one[1] has spoken of the Book as giving us a revelation of the glory of the Person the Lord, of the toiling and witnessing of the People of the Lord, and, finally, of the Purpose of the Lord in His People. This is not an exaggeration of the sweep of the Book's thought and disclosure, yet every figure, every vision, every revelation in the Book seems to focus on Christ and to take its meaning from Him. He is the center of the canvas. He is the theme of the oratorio. He is the hero of the drama. The Book is all these. All eyes look on Him whom they have pierced[2] as He is unveiled as the Faithful Witness,[3] the Giver of Life, the Ruler of Kings, the Savior of Men, the Judge of the World.

[1] Campbell Morgan, I believe. [2] 1:7. [3] 1:5.

II.

The Seer's thought moves around two poles: First, Christ is present in the world as the sufficient grace; secondly, Christ, present in the world as the sufficient grace, shall yet prevail completely. Read the Book as we will, and we must be conscious of its twofold message. Everywhere we feel the Divine Presence in the World. Everywhere we hear the prophecy of the Speedy Victory. He is with His own. He is to come in glory on the clouds. Both of these emphases are carried throughout the Book, and neither can be neglected without losing the Book's perspective. Still, this is not all that needs to be said at this point. Indeed, we do not thus come to the Book's central meaning, for what the Book says over and over again is this: *This Present Christ is to Prevail Completely by His*

Cross. This aspect of the Book can not be made too conspicuous, for the Book is a Book of Redemption. In it we see bloodshed, for the sword of Cæsar flashes throughout its pages. But in it we see still more conspicuously the shed-blood of Christ. As the Apostle at Calvary saw Christ lifted up as the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, saw Him as the Lamb of God, saw Him rather than the frenzied, howling mob, so the Seer makes his readers see the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world rather than the raging of the Beast, the martyr-fires rather than the blood flowing in the streets of Babylon.

III.

It would be convenient to group under these three headings what the Book has to say about Christ: First, Christ the

Sufficient Grace; second, Christ Conquering and to Conquer; third, Christ the Lamb of God, the Savior of the World. Perhaps, however, we shall come more easily to the vision of Christ that lay in the Seer's mind if we follow him through a few of the typical passages of the Book. This, at any rate, will be a more natural method of procedure.

In the first chapter of the Book we have three separate and distinct revelations of Christ. Each one brings out varied aspects of His life.

First there is the salutation (1: 4-6): "John to the seven Churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits that are before His throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of

the earth. Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood; and He made us to be a Kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

This passage would seem to be the Book in Epitome. Every phrase in it is important, and taken together these several aspects of Christ show our Lord risen and glorified. "Jesus Christ the Faithful Witness." The words remind us of Him who came into the world to bear witness to the Truth, and at once identify the Christ of the Book with the Christ of the Gospels. The Seer often lingers on the more earthly name of his Lord (12: 17; 22: 16), even sometimes speaking of Him simply as "Jesus," the offspring of David. He recalls His crucifixion at Jerusalem (11: 8 and 1: 7), His

resurrection and exaltation to the Throne in heaven (3:21). And this human aspect is not lost sight of even in the blazing glory of the Throne. The words given above remind us, as the Fourth Gospel does so eloquently, of the truth that came by Jesus Christ concerning God, man, duty, destiny, the natural order, the spiritual order. "The first born of the dead." We read these words and the light of Easter morning breaks upon us; here is the Christ whom not even death could conquer, and who came in the fullness of life that all might receive life from Him abundantly. "The ruler of the kings of the earth;" these words strike the dominant note of the Book concerning Christ. Throughout He is the Regal Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It would not be wise to say that the Seer's thought of Christ was

largely determined by the persistent effort on the part of the empire to deify the emperors. Yet it is to miss much of the subtle suggestion of the Book if we do not see that the imperial cult was constantly in the Seer's mind. He had met it everywhere, in his ministry, in the markets as well as at the imposing shrines of the empire, and now in his imprisonment he is always aware that he is a prisoner because of his testimony, *i. e.*, because of his refusal to "lord" Cæsar—Jesus alone is Lord to the Seer, and He is "Lord of lords." It is well to mark that he does not say *will be*—Christ is *already* Ruler of the kings of the earth. "Unto Him that loveth us"—present tense again, speaking now of the tenderness of Christ. This is not, as has just been said, the prevailing revelation of Christ in the Book. The Christians

of the day needed to see the regalness of Christ—Christ glorified. Yet in no other book of the New Testament do we see the gentleness of Christ, His graciousness, more winsomely set forth than in this Book.

"Unto Him . . . that loosed us from our sins by His blood; and made us to be kings and priests unto His God and Father." Here in the very first unveiling of Christ we come face to face with human sin, the deep problem of the Book. Here also we come face to face with the atonement for sin, an atonement which includes an enduement as well as a reconciliation. In the twelfth chapter we hear again of those who have overcome by "the blood of the Lamb." In 7: 14 we read, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them

white in the blood of the Lamb." Words these are that, like the Book as a whole, take us through the noisy streets of the earthly Jerusalem out to the place of the cross; nay, that take us back to the foundation of the world and show us the Lamb Slain.

Even more remarkable than any phrase in this passage, however, is the way in which Christ, the Jesus of the Gospels, is associated with God the Father and the Holy Spirit in this salutation. It is the way of the Book. It is so in the vision of the Throne and throughout.

IV.

After the salutation comes what may be called the Divine Asseveration. It is contained in the seventh and eighth verses.

The Seer does not speak these words; they are acclaimed by the Lord God Himself. (See John 19: 37). This is most effective dramatically. And it is necessary that these words should be spoken in an arrestive way, for they contain a truth of utmost importance, namely, the certain, speedy, and glorious manifestation of Christ in Judgment, a coming which is not here nor elsewhere conceived of as *physical*, though it is certainly conceived of as *real*.

This affirmation is repeated again and again, and reverberates throughout the Book (1: 1; 4: 1; 2: 16; 3: 3, 11, 20; 22: 6, 7, 20).

It was a word much needed by the downcast Church, and it is emphasized, perhaps, for that reason, and because it is a fact ever-needing to be set forth to faith. This revelation of Christ as Judge

is very suggestive. If any one wishes to follow it through the Book, let him study the letters to the Churches, where Christ is seen as Judge;[4] or let him study the Throne scene, where Christ opens the seals;[5] or the vision of the Sickle and the Harvest[6]—or yet again, the vision of the Great White Throne.[7] This Christ who is to come in glory is the Christ of Calvary, and thus again the humiliation and the exaltation of Christ are brought into closest juxtaposition.

It is not possible to over-emphasize this Divine Asseveration, for the Seer has done all he could do to set it in bold relief.

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[4] Chapters 2 and 3. [5] 4 *ff.* [6] 14: 14-20.
[7] 20: 11-15.

I agree with Doctor Thomas: "The Apocalypse might be truly called the Gospel of the Parousia, for the Second Advent is the secret of its unfolding and the goal of its movement." ("The Coming Presence," p. 164.) Only we must not think of Christ as absent and to return again. He is present now, and His Presence is to be yet more gloriously manifested.

V.

This revelation is followed by one of the most beautiful visions in the Book (1: 9-20). It might well be grouped with the vision of the Throne in heaven and the vision of the New Jerusalem, for each helps in the interpretation of the other, and the three are supremely beautiful.

The splendor and beauty of this vision must be felt by every reader, yet more striking is the truth it conveys. The Seer turns and sees first the candlesticks, *i. e.*, the Churches. He sees them separate and only candlesticks—utterly dependent. But as he looks he sees a figure like unto a "son of man." This phrase *may be* read in the light of Daniel or in the light of the Book of Enoch; but in view of all the color and the many touches of the Book of Revelation it certainly is better to read it in the light of the Master's

usage and take it here as meaning that the Seer saw in this glorious figure, first of all, the Master with whom he had gone in and out of Galilee. Yet He is not simply the Jesus of other days. There is an unmistakable glory about Him. His robe is the vesture of dignity and authority. His girdle is a king's; its position indicates His priestliness. As the Seer gazes he sees that there stands before Him the Ancient of Days, His hair white like wool, His eyes a flame of fire, His feet like unto burnished brass, His voice as the sound of the sea, His countenance bright as the sun. Out of His mouth comes the word that is a sword and in His hand is a chain of stars, for He is the Keeper of the Churches.

We do not wonder that the Seer was overwhelmed, for as His Lord speaks he realizes that he is in the presence of the

Express Image of God. There is no mistaking here. The Seer always sees his Lord in this glorified state.

What does this vision say? It says first of all that Christ is not an absentee Christ, but a present Christ. It says secondly that this present Christ is abundantly able, His grace is sufficient. He carries easily the stars in His hand.

The meaning of this vision is made clear in the letters to the Churches. We see Him there as the Risen, Regal, Glorified Christ of the pierced hands, exacting, mighty, gracious, ever-present, altogether sufficient. He pierces through all sophistries with His burning eyes.[8] He hates all compromise.[9] His rewards are for those only who overcome. He had in His keeping the crowns worthy to be striven for. He alone knows the way to the

[8] 2: 18. [9] 2: 6; 2: 14; 2: 20-23.

fountains of the water of life[10] and to the tree of life.[11]

Yet, withal—and this is the important emphasis here—He comes to comfort and to strengthen the Church. He knows those who dwell where Satan's throne is. He knows the works, the toil, the tribulations of His own. Let them not be discouraged. Let them be faithful to the end. He will come quickly. Then "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat—for He is their Shepherd and shall guide them unto the fountains of waters of life and shall wipe every tear from their eyes." (7: 16, 17).

We need to exercise great care in our reading of the revelation concerning Jesus Christ in the Book.

As has just been indicated, the Seer

[10] 7: 17. [11] 2: 7; 22: 2.

speaks of Christ very frequently as the Christ of tenderness and pity, touched with a feeling for our infirmities and as able and willing and eager to supply all our needs. Yet prevailingly it is not the gentleness of Christ that is brought home to us by the Book. That was not the aspect of Christ which needed to be made manifest to the Church then, for the Church of that time was pretty much brow-beaten and trampled upon. Cæsar seemed almighty, Rome invincible, the Church weakness itself. So we see the regal aspect of Christ in this Book. However, we should not misconceive this regalness.

Some interpreters have felt that the Book is unduly harsh and characterized by a blood-thirstiness utterly beneath the sublime level of the gracious Gospel of Jesus. It is not difficult to get this im-

pression. And it is all the more easy to get it because the Book was written in a time of flood and earthquake shock, in a time when the streets of earth were running red with human blood, when human torches lighted the Roman gardens, and when every follower of Christ lived a hunted life. This turmoil and tumult and confusion are echoed throughout the Book.

Empires and thrones were toppling over. A civilization was collapsing. The aspect of Christ that the Church needed to see was His mighty sufficiency. It needed to be made clear that the kings of the earth raged in vain. Precisely that aspect the Seer presents most frequently, and over and over again points to a manifestation yet to be made, glorious and splendid.

This regal aspect of Christ is suggested

in many passages through chapters two and three and throughout the Book, and is made explicit in the vision of the Conqueror (19: 11-16).

The Lord's Day vision is exceedingly important to a right interpretation of the Seer's way of setting forth his thought and to an understanding of his message. It should be noted that he speaks of the spiritual presence of Christ in the world after the most realistic manner. As he does here, so always.[12] Nor is any more important revelation given in the Book than this of the presence of Christ in the world here and now as the Sufficient Grace.

[12] Compare the realism of this vision with that in chapter twenty. There is no more reason for reading the vision in chapter one symbolically than there is for reading that in chapter twenty.

VI.

This *present* Christ is to *prevail*. How? By His sacrifice. Let us turn to the fifth chapter. There we see the Seer gazing through a door into heaven. The Angel is to let him witness the opening of the seven-sealed book, to show him how the struggle between the Kingdom and the empire is to issue. But no one seems to be able to open the book, and the Seer begins to weep, when he hears a voice from the midst of the Throne, saying, "Weep not for the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David hath prevailed to open the book." The Seer has been able to see thus far only the glory of the Throne. Now he is to see his Lord! What a word that must have been to him! He turns and looks—and sees a Slain Lamb! It is the Christ he had met at Jordan, the Christ he had left

at Calvary hanging on the tree! Notice not a Lamb, but a Slain Lamb. For He prevails because He *was slain*. As the Seer gazes upon the scene all the heavenly spaces are suddenly filled with jubilant singing, as ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of angelic voices celebrate the redemption that has come to people of every kindred and tongue and nation by the Blood of the Lamb. And the Seer sees that the Slain Lamb is full of wisdom and power. It is in the light of this revelation of Christ as the Slain Lamb that we are to read all the Seer says about the Conquering Christ.

How unfair we have been to this Book! How we have missed the meaning of the Seer! How we Occidentals have been held by a literalist caste of mind, utterly unable to catch the subtler

significance of the gorgeous imagery of the Book. So we have enlarged upon the harshness of the Book, the vindictiveness of its author, and the unlikeness of his mind to the mind of the Master. Yet, as nowhere else, the idea of Redemption is set forth in this Book. We get the impression of harshness because we, in spite of what we say, take the author literally. It is hard not to do so, but to do so is to lose our way. All that he says, for instance, about overcoming, about warfare, about flashing swords must be, of course, taken symbolically. It is in no sense to be materialized. Christ conquers by a two-edged sword, a sword mightier than Cæsar's. It is a splendid martial image. And as we see this Christ riding forth with His panoplied hosts our hearts are stirred as by the rattle of drums and the flapping of

the banners of a marching army. Again and again the bugle note of battle, mighty-trumpet-toned, sounds above the Book! But what is the sword of Christ? It is His Word. The Seer says, as Paul does, that the Kingdom goes forward by the foolishness of preaching. The Seer was not fomenting rebellion. True, he was protesting against lording any Cæsar —better die than do that. Not thus shall the Kingdom come. Yet the Seer knows that those who resort to the sword must perish by sword.[13] Not such is the patience of the saints. To compromise as the Nicolaitans[14] suggested was to become utterly paganized again. To die as Antipas and hosts of others had done was to sow the seed of the Kingdom.[15] Life is by death, prog-

[13] 13: 10. [14] For an excellent treatment of this subject, see Ramsay's "Letters to the Churches," pp. 298-302, 335-343.

[15] See Acts 14: 22.

gress by sacrifice, the Kingdom by blood! Thus Cæsar rages in vain! All he can do—he and his minions—is to strike down the followers of Christ. But every martyrdom is an advance. It is the coming of Christ again, the victory over the world.

Some writers on the Book, especially liberally minded modernish writers, seem to assume as a matter of course that the Seer was a harsh, vindictive, revengeful soul. Such a conception is an outrage on the author and the Book, and due to literalism. The Seer once did want to call fire down from heaven. He recalls the incident as readily as his modern annotators. He had been known as the Son of Thunder. His was a mighty soul. One never thinks of John as anemic or as dilettante! He was a pioneer. He was a conqueror. He was an empire

builder. *But he has been through the School of Calvary.* Let us fix that in our minds. Now he sets forth that only the false prophets call down, or try to call down, fire from heaven, for the patience of the saints is the conquest by love, not by the sword. He knows now the meaning of the suffering servant. He sees that the strong must carry the weak. He has entered into the meaning of the blood. He knows now what the Baptist meant when he called Jesus the Lamb of God. He uses that designation more than any other. He sees that what Moses did for the Israelitish horde coming up out of the brick fields of Egypt by the way of the wilderness his Lord has done for the race from the foundation of the world, for *He* has been *the* Suffering Servant. Hence the heavenly hosts sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Cal-

vary has given the Seer a new vision of history. He sees now that Calvary was the mighty climax of Christ's life and ministry. Christ was not a victim at Calvary, a lamb. He laid down His life Himself. No man took it from Him. He was the Slain Lamb. The mob did not prevail at Calvary. It raged in vain. Christ prevailed then. By His death He lives more abundantly. Thus He still prevails. He prevails by dying. He saves by His blood. He prevails by His martyrs. This is the patience of the saints. This is the great lesson to be learned in the School of Calvary.

Thus we come to the secret of the power and the gentleness of the Conquering Christ. As we shall see further on in the Book, this is the profound fact about God. He is like Christ. But just now, as we grasp the Seer's great central

idea of sacrificial love, which never faileth, let us once for all put aside the crude opinion that the Book stands for a materialized Christianity. It stands for a Christianity that comes to focus at Calvary. Let us also grasp the truth that the Seer everywhere represents Christ as conquering by His death, and not by His return.

VII.

There is one other question calling for answer in this connection before we shall see clearly the Seer's vision of Christ. Christ prevails by His Cross. What does it mean for Christ to prevail? When He has utterly prevailed, what shall we have? The marriage of the Lamb![16] The end of the redemptive travail is a new humanity completely

[16] 21: 2; 19: 17.

identified in spirit with Christ![17] The union symbolized under the image of the marriage of the Lamb—a most audacious image—is more spiritual and more intimate than that set forth under the similitude of the vine and the branches, for the latter is a vital union of a simple type. But the union of Christ and His own is a union of intellects, the banding together of hearts in holy affection, the coalescing of wills. It is, as the Seer says, a heavenly marriage. It is thus, of course, not an outward Kingdom that Christ sets up, at Jerusalem or anywhere else. The Seer has been graduated not simply from the Judaic School of the Apocalyptists, but from the School of Calvary, where one of the great lessons

[17] In an article (see Hastings' D. B., Book of Revelation), with which I find myself frequently taking issue, yet which abounds in fine insights, Professor F. C. Porter says: "The Christian community was His greatest deed. He created it by His redeeming death." (1: 6; 5: 9-10.)

learned is that the Kingdom is inward and spiritual. So we hear through him those beautiful words: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

VIII.

We should catch the sweep and lift of the Seer's thought. At the beginning of time he sees a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. At the end of the redemptive travail is a new humanity blood bought and blood washed, a humanity reigning upon the earth as priests and kings. And the law of that humanity is the law of love, the mind of Christ, the gentleness and the power of the Slain Lamb! *We* come to love at last because *He* loved us at first.

Now, if we read what the Seer has to say about Christ as the Truth, the Life, the Judge, the Conqueror, the Savior in the light of the vision of the Slain Lamb in the midst of the throne, and also in the light of the Vision of the New Humanity, we shall be able to master something of the glory and beauty and spiritual significance of the Seer's conception of Christ.

THE BOOK AND THE CHURCH.

CHRISTIANITY was destined by its very nature not to save, but to destroy the empire: at the same time their outward correspondence was not less full of meaning. All that was progressive in the Old World was united under one supreme head at the time when the new faith was revealed which should bind the universe together in a sovereign unity. Peace won by arms ushered in Him who revealed the peace of life in God. So it was that the only two powers which have claimed absolute dominion over mankind appeared together. For three centuries each followed the necessary law of its development. Then at last the Empire was seen to have failed; and the Church was seen to contain the forces which could regenerate and rule the world. Diocletian, when he finally organized the old power of the State, with the greatest political genius gave the occasion for the concentration of the power of the Church and prepared the way for its victory.—*Westcott, "The Two Empires: The Church and the World."*

THE BOOK AND THE CHURCH.

THE Book is a revelation of Jesus Christ, the unveiling of His meaning and glory, until at last we see Him stand forth as the Word of God, the great Life-giver, the Ruler of the kings of the earth, the Savior of the world, the Judge of all men. But it is, first of all, a revelation of Jesus Christ to the Church. It is not possible to unseal this Book until we recognize in it a pastoral letter to the Church of the Seer's time, which, because it was a message to its day, will be a message to all time. As we read it we shall learn that the Seer never loses sight of the Church, that he always speaks to her with authority, with knowledge, with insight, with tender sympathy. He knows

the weakness of the Church. He knows her lack of faith. He knows her sorrows. He will have no compromise on her part. He would make clear to her the riches of Christ.

I.

It will be best for us in this study to confine our attention chiefly to chapters two and three, known as the letters to the Churches. But it will be well to keep in mind that the Book as a whole is a pastoral letter—in apocalyptic form, it is true, but still a letter—and that as a letter from the Shepherd of the sheep to His flock it urges the Church to look up to her Lord and live (2-3), to see her life and work under the aspect of eternity (4-11), under no circumstances to surrender to the seductions of the world (12-20), for it is her duty to make ready for her Lord as a bride for the bride-

groom (21-22), for salvation is entering fully into the mind of Christ.

II.

Whatever else may be said of chapters two and three, and, in fact, of the whole Book, for that matter, we may say this: They reflect an actual historical situation. To be sure, the Seer speaks of seven Churches, and we may gather from that symbolical number that his message is to the whole Church, and yet also to seven actual Churches, for the tone of authority which rings throughout these messages, as well as the intimate knowledge of varying local conditions, indicates that much.

The following statement from Ramsay ("Letters to the Seven Churches," p. 80) covers both these points: "It is a psychological impossibility that these

Letters to the Asian Churches could have been written except by one who felt himself, and had the right to feel himself, charged with the superintendence and oversight of all those Churches, invested with Divinely given and absolute authority over them, gifted by long knowledge and sympathy with insight into their nature and circumstances, able to understand the line on which each was developing, and finally bringing to a focus in one moment of supreme inspiration, whose manner none but himself could understand or imagine, all the powers he possessed of knowledge, of intellect, of intensest love, of gravest responsibility, of sympathy with the Divine life, of commission from his Divine Teacher."

We know that John came to his dominion in the Kingdom of Christ largely after the passing of James and

Peter and Paul. By his time the gospel of good tidings had been preached throughout the provinces, in the barracks, in the capitals of the world. Its messengers had sailed in many crafts and run along the great highways sowing the seed of the Kingdom, witnessing to the great truths of Christianity and the great grace of God in Jesus Christ. By his time companies of men had been swept into higher experiences, as, for instance, at Jerusalem under Peter, at Samaria under Philip, at Ephesus under Paul. The Christian movement had steadily gained momentum. So miraculously had the Word spread and been glorified that a new situation had arisen: the Church and the empire confronted each other. Precisely such a situation is reflected in the Book of Revelation, especially the latter part of it. There we see the

Church and the empire confronting each other. And the Church, strong compared with what it had been twenty-five years earlier, was weakness itself when compared with the mailed figure of the malignant spirit of the world as embodied in the empire.

It is at such a juncture that the Seer speaks, seeking to hearten the Church, and to interpret to the Church its perplexing situation and its great mission.

If there were any question on this score, the reference to the Nicolaitans would be sufficient to indicate clearly an actual historic situation. From chapter 2: 6 it is clear that the Seer discerned in that party a tendency of utmost menace to the Church. In chapter 2: 15 his intense feeling flames forth again in vehement protest. From the reference to the leaders of that movement as of a

spirit kindred to that of Jezebel's and of Balaam's, we may conclude that the Nicolaitans were advocates of some kind of compromise on the part of the Christians with Paganism.[1] It seems probable that they were converts commercially and socially connected with pagan usages and customs, so that a come-outer policy rigidly adhered to would have embarrassed them greatly. What harm could there be in eating meat that had been offered to idols? What harm could there be in recognizing Cæsar's claim to divinity? What were a few grains of incense, anyway? But the Seer saw that all this was a specious plea for acquiescence in a pagan standard of morality and life, so he thundered against it. It is well to note that the letters reveal that this tendency was not present

[1] See Ramsay, Swete, and others.

in all the Churches, nor equally strong in all the Churches where it was present. This is one index of the specific character of each message. There are many such indications. Each Church has its peculiar peril and weakness. To each a particular, personal word is spoken. Even a hasty reading reveals the material wealth of the Laodicean Church. We easily get the force of the phrase "Satan's seat," and understand that Pergamos was an especially trying place.

It is not necessary that I go into details on this score. I prefer to emphasize two points concerning the Church that stand out clearly in these chapters two and three, and, indeed, throughout the Book.

First, the Church is weak, and all but overborne by the world.

III.

There should be no misunderstanding of what has been said as to the strength of the Church. It was weak enough when compared with the world it was to evangelize and Christianize.

We speak of "the Church of Ephesus." The phrase seems almost ironical. No reporter, even, would ever have heard of it. The secular historian practically ignored it. The Seer does not try to evade the fact of its insignificance, humanly speaking. Indeed, he dwells upon it. He represents the Churches as both weak and separate. Their isolation one from the other is suggested in the vision which shows them as candlesticks, not as a candelabra. He knows, too—in fact, he knows only too well—that these weak Churches are not only confronted by the world, but invaded by it. With what

faithful pastoral spirit does he insist upon the growing worldliness of his Churches. A careful study of the second and third chapters shows that every society mentioned has been deeply affected by its environment. Set to transform the world, the Seer reminds them that the world has been making them conform to it. For instance: The Church of Ephesus, located in a city noted for sudden and radical changes, has lapsed from its first love. The city of Smyrna was noted for its fidelity to Cæsar. The Church in Smyrna reflected its environment, and was seeking to hold on, though ready to faint. Pergamos was a center of imperial power. The Church there had become intimidated. The Thyatiran Church, affected by its neighborhood, is represented as compromising. Sardis, apparently built on a rock, was really

built on mud. The Church of Sardis had the form of righteousness, but not the power. Philadelphia was a gate-city, and the Church of Philadelphia seemed overawed by the very bigness of its opportunity; while the Church in Laodicea, a prosperous commercial center, had become utterly materialized.

How far these tendencies toward worldliness had gone it is difficult to determine. If we are to judge by the Seer's fierce denunciations, they had gone far. At any rate, he saw the peril and, like a faithful shepherd, gave warning. If the Nicolaitans were, as has been suggested, those who sought to be true to the Church without withdrawing from the guilds and fraternities and varied social and commercial practices of the time, we get an excellent insight into the problem with which the Church was confronted.

It is not difficult to get a right opinion concerning the Church of Ephesus. It had been born in a revival. It had had great leaders, Apollos, Paul, Timothy, John. It had done much. It was still busy. It was impatient of evil and heresy. Yet it had lost its first love. How searching the pastor-like criticism of the Seer! It was still correct, but passionless. Its enthusiasm had begun to decay. Its sword was in limp hands.

The Seer's picture of the Church of Laodicea is even more suggestive. It reveals a Church large and prosperous.[2] Its constituency was wealthy, its congregation well dressed,[3] its finances in excellent condition. Some of the cloth manufacturers belonged to it.[4] The maker of medicines was also in its following.[5] But the Seer represents that the Laod-

[2] 3: 17. [3] 3: 17. [4] 3: 18. [5] 3: 18.

icean Church lacked in spiritual vision and was poor spiritually. It had no zeal. It had no evangelistic power. It cared not for Christ's counsel. Indeed, the Seer startles us, if we read aright, by suggesting that Christ had been utterly crowded out.[6]

This is the first point the Book makes concerning the Church. It is weak, vacillating, uncertain of itself, all but trampled out by the world. But the Seer is not chastising the Church. He is seeking to arouse it—to recall it, to regird it for its great task.

IV.

We come to the second point: Weak as it is, overborne as it is, the Church is to overcome the world.

Would we be very far from the truth

[6] 3: 20.

if we were to say the mission of the Church, God's messenger to the nations, is so to witness to the sacrificial, atoning, propitiating, redeeming love of God manifested in Christ Jesus as that the proud, imperial, rebellious spirit of man may be brought by the way of penitence and faith into the sacrificial love of God, into completeness of spiritual life, into the stature of the fullness of Christ?

As I read it, that is something of what the Book of Revelation says about the mission of the Church. And as I read that Book I understand that the Seer is seeking to interpret to the Church its great mission and to send it forth with new courage on that mission. Both these results he accomplishes by unveiling the glorified Christ to the Church.

It is difficult for us to appreciate the importance of this service rendered by

the Seer. Bear in mind that the Church was reeling under the persecution of the empire. It was faint from a literal loss of blood, and ready to give up the terrible ordeal.

I have already spoken of the unveiling of Christ in the Book. We can see what this must have meant in the way of heartening the Church. The Seer was helping them to see Jesus in His glory as King of kings and Judge of all the earth. He had pressed home upon their thought the sufficiency of Christ as Savior. Too much emphasis can not be laid upon the point that the Seer above all things else sought to make the Church see that Christ was present with His Church and that He would prevail. Nor can too much be made of the fact that the vision of the Glorified Christ as with His Church and yet quickly to be made

manifest more gloriously[7] is given in the very first chapter of the Book.

It is also important that we study the revelation of Christ made to each Church. Thus we complete the study already made of Christ. I need no more than indicate my meaning—Ephesus is slipping back—Christ is represented to Ephesus as holding the stars in His hand. He can hold her fast. Smyrna is gasping, faint—Christ is revealed to Smyrna as "alive for evermore." Pergamos trembles before the sword of Cæsar—Christ is revealed to Pergamos with the two-edged sword. Thyatira is compromising—the Lord comes to Thyatira with eyes that penetrate all make-believes. Sardis has the form but not the power of godliness—

[7] I would emphasize the distinction between Christ as present with His Church and Christ as yet to be more gloriously manifested. The latter insistence is one of the two major messages.

Jesus is revealed as the quickening spirit. Philadelphia is set in the gateway of the nations, but seems unable to enter the door—the Lord comes to Philadelphia with the keys. Laodicea is full of the world, all but wholly materialized—the manifestation of the Lord to Laodicea is a manifestation of the wrath of the Lamb.

Thus the Seer makes clear that he knows the difficulty of the Church's position, yet his insistence is unyielding. The Church, weak as it is, must conquer. The Church's mission is the victory over the world, or, as we may put it in the phrase of our own time, "the Christianization" of all life, all customs, all institutions; the bringing of all thoughts, all affections, all purposes into obedience to Christ.

The Book has back of it, under it, the assumption that the Church is,

through Christ, to constitute a new community, and this assumption finds explicit expression again and again.

V.

Possibly this sounds too modern to be really a true reading of the Seer's message. If so, then read these words from Findlay's "Fellowship in the Eternal Life," pp. 359-362, where he is commenting on 1 John 5:1-5. His words certainly might have been used to describe the situation reflected in the Book. At the same time they are so interesting in the light of current theological thought that they may well be quoted at some length:

"It was a dismal world St. John surveyed—the world which had Domitian for its emperor, Juvenal for its poet, and Tacitus for its historian. In all directions

men lay crushed beneath the tyrannies and evils of the age. He and his comrades alone upon that wide arena stand erect and free; nowhere but in the Christian camp are there found confidence and resourcefulness: 'Who is he that overcometh the world,' the Apostle cries, 'save he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?' *Victory* is the word in which, at this threatening hour, the last of the apostles sums up his personal experience and records the issue of the first grand campaign of Christ's Kingdom, during which its future course and history had been rehearsed. He sees 'the darkness passing away, and the true light already shining.' So Jesus had been bold to say, with Gethsemane and Calvary awaiting Him, 'Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world!' (John 16: 33).

"St. John thus celebrates the end of the first century. We have witnessed the end of the nineteenth; and still the fight goes on—a weary warfare! As one crisis after another passes, the war of the ages opens into larger proportions; it sweeps over a wider area and draws into its compass more completely the forces of humanity—this immense combat between the sin of man and the Grace of God in Christ. The end is not yet. The powers of evil recover from defeat; one and another of the heads of 'the wild beast' are 'smitten unto death,' and 'his death-stroke is healed, and the whole earth wonders after' him again (Rev. 13: 3). The advance of Christ's Kingdom calls into the field at every stage new opposers; treasons and schisms, and collusions and compromises with the enemy, have caused innumerable repulses and

indefinite delays in the subjugation of the world to the rule of Christ, which seemed imminent to the fervent hope of His early followers. Still their faith remains—our faith—after this long testing, the rallying center of the spiritual forces, the fountain of hope and refreshment for all that is best in mankind. Everything else has changed: empires, civilizations, social systems, religions, and philosophies have gone down into the gates of Hades; but the Church of Jesus Christ survives and spreads, the imperishable institution of our race. Still the Gospel shines out over the storm-swept shores, the one lighthouse for the laboring ship of human destiny. The Christian faith, as St. John proclaimed and held it, is the most vital thing in the world, the most active and ameliorative factor of modern history. 'Neither is their salvation in any

other;' up to this date 'no other name has been given under heaven amongst men, whereby we must be saved.' Nothing since its coming has touched human nature to the like saving effect; nothing else at the present time takes hold of it so freshly, and with an influence so powerful for good, and for good so manifold, as the doctrine which St. John calls 'Our faith.'

"The struggle in which John the Apostle was engaged as a foremost combatant, while it has swelled into world-wide dimensions, has assumed features outwardly far different from those of his times. But the identity of principle is profound. And the conflict of faith in the twentieth century, in some of its conditions, repeats the experience of the first century, more closely than has been the case at any intervening epoch. Now,

as then, the contest centers in the primary facts of the Gospel-record, and in the nature and authority of Jesus Christ as thereby authenticated; other issues are brushed aside. Once more we 'have the same conflict which' we 'saw to be in' St. Paul and St. John. Present-day discussions are going to the root of things in Christianity; and Christians may rejoice in the fact, since a conflict so radical should be the more decisive. The testimony of the apostles to Jesus Christ the Son of God, and the living work of His Spirit amongst men: these two demonstrations, just as at the beginning, supply the ground on which faith and unbelief are now contending. Here lie the burning questions of the hour; other debates momentous as they have been and still may be—concerning the authority of Church or Bible, the validity of Orders

and Sacraments, or the doctrines of Election and Free Will—have fallen into abeyance in comparison of these. *Who was Jesus Christ? Does He live and work in the world since His death on Calvary? and if so, where and how?* This is what men are wanting to know; and who of those that have known Him can tell us better, with more intimate knowledge and transparent sincerity, than His servant John?"

VI.

The Seer seems to lose sight of the Churches after the third chapter. But he does not. He thinks of the unity of the Church rather than its separateness from thence on, it is true, for he is thinking of the Church as confronted by the world. But every vision has the Church in view, and at last we see her come forth glorious and beautiful, adorned as a

Bride. That was the Seer's faith in the Church. And his faith was justified. His appeal was not in vain. The Church did not die from loss of blood. She arose from the martyr fires purified and disciplined and furnished with an unconquerable faith. History records that fact. And history must give the Book large credit for the victory the Church gained over the world, for certainly it is not possible to exaggerate the quickening power of the trumpet appeal of the great Seer.

THE BOOK AND THE GOD OF HOLY LOVE.

THE great section of the book now completed ends, as it began, with a vision of the heavenly order. In 4: 1*ff* a door is set open in heaven, through which the Seer is able to discern the Throne of God and its surroundings; in 11: 19 the Temple of God in heaven is opened, and the Ark of the New Covenant is seen standing in the Celestial Sanctuary. Moreover, the whole series of visions which intervenes between these two revelations is full of heavenly things and persons. Most of the scenes are laid in heaven; the rest, though on earth, are illuminated by the presence of superhuman agents.

Yet, as a whole, the section is concerned with movements which find their sphere on the earth. The purpose of the celestial scenery and the celestial agencies which are employed is not to take the attention of the reader from contemporary or coming events, but to lead him to connect these with the invisible powers by which they are controlled, and to let the light of heaven fall upon the earthly tragedy. The Throne and the Temple in the (ἐπουρανια) are seen to be the ultimate source of the energies by which human history is carried to its goal. But it is in human history that the interests of the prophecy are centered.—*Swete,* "*The Apocalypse of St. John,*" *pp. 145-6.*

THE BOOK AND THE GOD OF HOLY LOVE.

The Book of Revelation divides naturally into two parts, the first part ending with chapter eleven. So complete is this first part that it has been remarked, had the remainder of the Book by some untoward circumstance been lost to us, we should never have missed it. I think we can not all wholly agree to that; but in any event we must, all of us, be thankful that the last portion was not thus lost, for in it we find some most sublime outlooks and much ground for hope and courage.

The section which we are now considering (Chapters 4-11) has caused no little difficulty to interpreters, for aside

from its difficult symbolism is a time reference which, taken by itself under a rational construction, would place the writing of the Book before the Fall of Jerusalem. But both strong internal and external evidence point to a later date for portions of the Book at least. Commentators have divided in their attempts to meet this difficulty, some giving the reference to Jerusalem a spiritual import, making it point to a spiritual Israel, and others holding that the Seer in that passage (11:8) was quoting from an earlier Apocalypse, while still others have denied the unity of the Book.

Perhaps a satisfactory solution of the problem is to be found in the earlier origin of this entire first part of the Book, or at least of the section covered by chapters four to eleven, the Book as a whole being completed later. Certainly

no careful reader thinks of the Apocalypse as the vision of a single night. It is such a Book as comes out of much watching and praying. Its actual construction may well have covered a period of some years, during which time the several revelations were being put together into the Revelation to the Churches—to the Churches of Asia (1: 4) and to the Church of all time (22: 6-21).

The Seer in the spirit standing at the door of heaven sees a throne of blazing light; from it extends a hand clasping a seven-sealed book—the book of destiny. In the midst of the Throne he sees One like unto a Slain Lamb, who takes the book and begins to remove the seals. When the first seal is opened the Seer beholds a white horse with a rider carrying a bow, symbolizing conflict; the second seal is opened and a red horse

comes forth, his rider carrying a sword to take peace from the earth; the third seal is opened and a black horse comes forth, his rider carrying a pair of balances, symbolizing famine; the fourth seal is opened and a pale horse comes forth with Death riding upon him. When the fifth seal is opened the Seer beholds under the altars those who had been slain for the Word of God, and he hears them cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Then the sixth seal is opened: "And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; and the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth, as a fig tree casteth her unripe figs when she is shaken of a great wind.

And the heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the princes and the chief captains, and the rich and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?" (6: 12-17.)

Thus the future opens before the Seer, conflict, slaughter, famine, death, the day of wrath. Before the final seal is opened there is a pause in which the Seer witnesses the sealing of a great multitude to be spared in the great and terrible day.

Verses 9-17, Chapter 7, are important. They serve first to emphasize the righteousness of the retributions that have come upon the earth, making clear both the invincibility and the stainlessness of God's righteousness, God who is the Holy God, whose throne is an unstained white. Secondly, these verses press upon the attention of the Seer's fellow-sufferers, as upon his own mind, that the fidelity of Christ's own is not in vain. It will be well for the reader of the Book to make a special note of the beautiful and tender aspect of the Eternal revealed in this passage. Thirdly, these verses serve to set in wonderful relief the terrible woes which follow in rapid succession and with most dramatic effect.

At last the seventh seal is opened, and there is silence—silence, as it seemed to the Seer, for half an hour—an ominous

silence presaging judgment. As this seal is opened we realize that we are not so much going forward as recapitulating. The judgments are coming to pass. God has heard the prayers of His people, and the censer with the fire of Divine Wrath has been hurled to the earth. The seventh seal is given under the sounding of seven startling trumpets, the three last of which bear upon human life directly and are called woes. The trumpets sound and calamity after calamity falls upon the earth, not utterly destroying it, but grievously afflicting it. Vegetation is blighted, the springs and rivers are defiled, the light of the sun and moon is darkened. Locusts and horsemen, sublimely terrible symbols of retribution, sweep with devouring fury across the earth. The judgments are swift and harrowing, but the world upon which

they fall is an unrepentant world, worshiping idols and devils, full of murders, sorceries, fornications, and thefts.

The Seer, as the reader, is plainly overwhelmed when a mighty angel descends to the earth and, striding the sea and the land, with uplifted hand swears by the Living God that there shall be no longer delay, for the purpose of God is to be manifest when the last trumpet sounds, as it is about to do.[1]

Meantime the Seer is reminded that other revelations will be given him. But as he gazes he sees the monster from the pit wreak his fury upon the Church, slaying her prophets in the city where their Lord was crucified and leaving their dead bodies in the streets of the city. And denizens[2] of the earth rejoice over them and make merry and send gifts to

[1] 10: 6. [2] 11: 10.

one another, because they have done, they think, with these troublers of Israel. But even as they make merry the earth shakes, the buildings of the city move from their foundations, and the great city is swallowed up in wrath. It is the last woe. The last trumpet has sounded, and the Seer hears a multitude of heavenly voices saying: "The kingdom of the world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders who sit before God on their thrones fell upon their faces and worshiped God, saying, We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast because Thou hast taken Thy great power and didst reign. And the nations were wroth, and Thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give their

reward to Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear Thy name, the small and the great; and to destroy them that destroy the earth."

Such in meagerest outline is the movement of events as given in this section of the Book. I have tried to give the matter as I think it comes to one at the first hasty reading. And if I do not misjudge, a great deal of emphasis has been placed upon the symbolism of the Book, its weird and awful figures. Yet to put the emphasis there is to miss the deeper reason of the Seer. I want to ask now, What is the *meaning* of all these seals and trumpets, thunders and lightnings, fires and earthquakes, angels and monsters, that come before us in sickening thickness in this Scripture?

I began with the opening of the seals. I really had no right to do that. The

Seer does not begin that way. The opening of the seals is not the all-important matter in this section of the Book. The Seer begins with the vision of the throne in heaven. And so must we. Let us look again:

"After these things I saw and, behold, a door opened in heaven, and the former voice that I heard, a voice as of a trumpet spoke with me, saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter. Straightway I was in the Spirit, and, behold, there was a throne, set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne; and he that sat was to look upon like a jasper stone and a sardius; and there was a rainbow round about the throne, like an emerald to look upon. And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones; and upon the thrones I saw four and

twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments; and on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God; and before the throne as it were a sea of glass like unto crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come.

And when the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to Him that sitteth on the throne, to Him that liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders shall fall down before Him that sitteth on the throne, and shall worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor, and the power: for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they were and were created.

"And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof? And no one in the heaven or on the earth or under the earth was

able to open the book, or to look thereon. And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon: and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. And He came, and He taketh it out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne. And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of

the saints. And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art Thou to take the book and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain and didst purchase unto God with Thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth. And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And every created thing which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them, heard

I, saying, Unto Him that sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever. And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshiped."

You recall that the Seer placed the vision of the Glorified Christ at the beginning of the previous section, in fact at the beginning of his Book as a whole. So now he starts in with a vision of the throne in heaven. Not until he had felt the power of that throne were the seals opened.

The Seer says to his readers in this section, which gets its full meaning only in the light of what precedes: "You have looked at the Church in the world. You have seen it separate, weak, disheartened, invaded by the world, opposed by the world, yet sustained by Him from

whose eyes nothing is hidden, whose feet are brass, whose word is a two-edged sword—a company of men and women sustained upon hidden manna, kept of the Lord. But you need to get a new point of view—to see the Church in its conflict with sin from the eternal point of view." So he opens a door in heaven through which he gazes, through which he called upon the Churches of Asia to gaze, through which the Church of all ages should gaze.

What a wonderful vision is this of the throne set in heaven! I must not linger upon it, but it is full of beauty and majesty, one of the most sublime pictures of all time, every detail carrying its meaning. The thing itself is a blaze of jasper light, clear as crystal, a light to which no mortal may approach unto. The Seer is careful to make this clear,

for he was a Jew, with a Jew's sense of awe. The Seer's position is important: he stands at the door of heaven, a glassy sea stretching away from him to the throne, adding glory to the scene, but also showing us God afar—and unapproachable. The Sardius, glowing red, reminds us again that our God is a consuming fire; the emerald rainbow arching above the jasper splendor suggests that the eternal justice is full of mercy; the burning torches in front of the throne speak of the wisdom of the Most High. About the throne the four and twenty elders on separate thrones, crowned and robed, patriarchs and apostles in glorious company, symbolize that the Churches of the Old and New Covenant are one, while the living creatures in the midst of the throne speak of the whole creation; and as we listen to the ascriptions of praise

ascending from the heavenly hosts we see that we are in the presence of the Living God, Maker of heaven and earth.

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created."

But the fullness of the meaning of this vision can not be grasped until we see the Lamb in the midst of the throne: "And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth."

This Lamb is a Lion—His horns and eyes indicate fullness of power and wisdom; that He is slain reminds us of Calvary.

It is worthy of note that while the Seer stands at the door, remote from the throne, he draws near as the seals are opened, for by Christ we all draw nigh to God; that is, in the Slain Lamb in the midst of the throne we have the completion of the idea of God, the revelation in the Son.

Now, what is the meaning of this throne set in heaven, blazing with light, in the midst of which is the Lamb Slain? First of all, this: The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. His throne stands. Righteousness and wisdom are over all, and He is worthy of all worship. That was a good thing for the Seer to see and realize—a good thing for the Churches of Asia to come to know and for the Church in all ages to learn.

We should bear in mind how difficult it is at best for man to keep his faith,

that there is an even justice in the world, and that the evil devices of men must ever fail, however cunningly they may be conceived and carried forward. If this is so under fairly normal conditions, we can imagine how the hearts of men failed them in the bloody days in which the Seer lived. But we are not left to our fancy on this score. Throughout the Book we hear the sobbing of the Churches. Again and again we see that the Church is fainting. The sword of Cæsar has struck terror to the heart of every one. Some of them have gone back and some have compromised, as at Thyatira. All are smitten with paralysis. The Seer realizes this. He assures them that he is a fellow-sufferer. He does not wonder that they cry out, "How long, O Lord, how long!" He himself wept when he thought the Book of Destiny was to

remain sealed, *i. e.*, the outcome of the struggle was not to be made manifest. One of his prime purposes is to give the Church grounds for hope.

And this he does by helping them to see God high and lifted up, invincible in His righteousness. It may seem to the Church that the Monster from the Abyss alone has power; but it is made increasingly clear as the seals are opened in the blazing glory of the throne that the Monster and his minions have their freedom in vain. The Lord God, the Almighty, holds His power and reigns (11: 17), and His purpose shall be accomplished (10: 7). And all this the saints on earth as well as the redeemed in heaven come to see.

God's throne stands invincible in righteousness. His purpose in His people is not to be defeated. This one aspect

of the revelation of this section is seen in the vision of the throne and in various passages of this section which, on the one hand, gather their meaning from the glory of the throne and, on the other hand, enable us better to see, as it were, its blazing light. Ponder patiently the setting and symbolism of the scene which reveals the martyrs beneath the altar, waiting but not forgotten; the white-robed throng before the throne; the vision of the fountains of waters; the Lamb who is also the Good Shepherd leading forth His flock to the green pastures and the place of springs; the prayers ascending as sweet incense to God; and finally, the outburst of the song of triumph.

This is one meaning of the throne vision. But it has a deeper meaning. In the midst of the throne is a Slain

Lamb. What does that mean? I do not see how we can miss the meaning of the symbol of the Slain Lamb in the throne. Does it not mean that God is like Christ? He is both the Creative Spirit and the Redemptive Grace.

Here we have that great truth central to the Johannine teaching, central to all Christian teaching—God is Love. Back of all things, under all things, holding all things in its bosom, is the love of our Heavenly Father. It is here proclaimed in gorgeous imagery. It was an audacious thing for the Seer to place the Lamb in the midst of the throne; only let us keep in mind that he did no such thing. What he did was to *see* the Lamb in the midst of the throne. He proclaims more than a Righteous God; he proclaims a God of Righteousness working out His purposes through His people.

Judaism held to a similar conception. But the Seer has eliminated all racial barriers in his thought of the people. He has done more. He has made it clear for all time that the righteousness of God prevails in His purposes because at heart it is the sacrificial Love, the Love that comes not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Here we are at the heart of the vision of the throne. The Seer stands off in awe as he sees God high and lifted up; but he draws nigh as tremblingly he looks up and beholds in the midst of the throne Him whom the world pierced on Calvary. We must not miss the significance of the changed position of the Seer as he draws nigh the throne, for therein is revealed the deep Christian message of the whole Book. Only in the light of the throne of Eternal Love have we a right to gaze upon the panorama of

the opening seals, for God's purposes in judgment are by no means vindictive, but redemptive—redemptive in purpose always; frustrated again and again by individual men and women and thus delayed, but not frustrated for the race as such, for the Love which gave to man in the beginning an earthly paradise will strive with him until he shall be brought back, as the Book shows, to the Tree of Life and to the banks of the River of the Water of Life.[3]

Thus the Seer enables his readers in this section to look at their struggle with sin in the light of eternity, and helps them to see that, whatever may be the seeming, under all things is an invincible Righteousness conquering by the gentle power of Love. Thus the Book is not a book of doom. God does not destroy

[3] 22: 2.

the earth, but those who would destroy the earth (11: 18)—Christianity is the religion of the new earth, of the new humanity, of regeneration, for all things are to be made new. Above the terrible trumpets of the angels of the Woes we hear the Cherubic Chorus of victory, and see that mightier than the malignant self-will of man is the good-will of God who is the Holy Love.

I do not say that this is all these wonderful chapters reveal, but I do not hesitate to say that this is the most wonderful disclosure contained therein, for the Glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ is the Light of life for all mankind, and will ever be.

THE BOOK AND THE BEAST.

RENDER unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.—*Matt. 22: 21.*

In the case of Polycarp at Smyrna in the year 155 it was a question of the "Lord" formula. "What is the harm in saying 'lord Cæsar?'" the Irenarch Herod and his father Nicetes asked the saint seductively. The scene enacted on 17 July 180 at Carthage before the judgment-seat of Proconsul P. Vigellius Satŭrninŭs stands out even more plainly. The Roman official commands the Christian Speratus of Scili in Armidia: "Swear by the genius of our lord the emperor!" And the Christian answers: "I know no imperium of this world, . . . I know my Lord, the King of kings and Emperor of all nations."—*Deissmann, "Light from the Ancient East," p. 360.*

THE BOOK AND THE BEAST.

We now come upon a new prophecy. We are made aware of this by, among other things, a change of atmosphere and a change in symbolism. We have been looking through an open door upon a world of light and peace. We now turn to more earthly scenes and begin to read about the Great Red Dragon, the Beast, and Babylon. How do we explain this change of color, of climate, of sky? Is this another book? Are we suddenly in the company of another prophet?

Not at all. In chapters twelve to twenty the Seer makes a new survey of the Kingdom of God in the world. He shifts his point of view.

In chapters one to three he is opening

the eyes of his fellow-Christians to the Divine Presence in the world. Under beautiful imagery he is speaking to them of the sustaining grace of the friendship of Christ. He there points out the springs by the way and the hidden manna. He does this because they have need of such help. In chapters four to eleven he opens for them a door looking in upon the heavenly world that they may see the Light, which no man can approach unto, that they may hear cherubic choruses. And he does this because they had need of seeing their lives, their toil and travail, for the Kingdom under the aspect of eternity. He there permits them to witness the unsealing of the seven-sealed book that they may better understand the divine character and the divine purpose.

In the chapters which we shall now

try to read he gives them a close-range view of the Beast, that they may see his malignity, and especially that they may see the futility of that malignity.

We need to guard ourselves against one subtle illusion at the very beginning of this reading. Naturally enough, we shall feel that we are going forward. In the twentieth chapter we ought to be farther along than in the eleventh. Well, we do go forward in this Book. Only let us keep in mind that the time sequence here is of little consequence. We do go forward, but not so much in time as into a deeper understanding of the ultimate and inevitable issue of God's Kingdom in the world. All interpreters have noted the resemblance between the judgments described under the symbolism of the trumpets and that found in this section of the Book under the symbolism of the

golden bowls. There is a real resemblance. There is, as some interpreters have insisted, a recapitulation, for, as has just been said, the Seer in these chapters twelve to twenty is making a resurvey of the Kingdom. He is viewing the Kingdom again and from a new angle. It will be profitable to trace the outlines of this prophecy before we try to determine its deeper meaning and controlling ideas.

II.

This section of the Book extends from chapter twelve through chapter twenty. But, strictly speaking, the action begins at chapter thirteen, where the Seer beholds the Beast rising out of the sea receiving his power from the Dragon standing on the sandy shore (13: 1; 13: 4). Chapter twelve, then, consisting, as it apparently does, of several quotations

from some existing apocalypse possibly well known both to the Seer and to his first readers, is introductory to all that follows, and makes the telling suggestion that the malignity of the Beast so painfully felt by the Church is inspired by the Dragon. Thus chapter twelve, with its silhouettes of the Dragon, gives tone to all that follows just as in the previous section the Glory of the Throne falls over all the succeeding visions. The explanation of those scholars who look upon this chapter as a group of quotations adapted to the Seer's uses seems to cover not only such facts as those in verses 10-12 and 17, but accounts for the different color and general conception of this Scripture. Verses 1-6 contain two pictures, one of the Dragon and the other of the Woman or Church thrown, as it were, upon the screen of the sky (for "in

heaven," verse 1, is not to be taken as meaning within heaven as in chapter four; see verse 5); and verses 7-17 give an account in descriptive, not pictorial, form of the casting forth of the Dragon from heaven and his consequent bitter enmity towards the Church which lies within the heavenly purpose and is dear to the heavenly hosts and to the Lord of the heavenly hosts.

The Dragon is not the subject of this section, yet he has much to do with this section and with this Book. Spiritual antagonism is a recognized fact. All goodness is constantly menaced. That we all know. The Seer, and the Scriptures throughout, personalize this antagonism. The opposition to the Kingdom is embodied in the Dragon, that Old Serpent, Apollyon, the Devil. In the shadowy background he stands. Subtly

but persistently he exerts his influence. It is so in these chapters. *They have to do with the Beast.* But the Beast gets his authority from the Dragon. By an unfailing artistic instinct the Seer suggests this at the beginning of his prophecy, and we feel the Evil Presence everywhere. It is necessary for us to see the Dragon in order to understand the Beast. So there he is, limned against the sky in strange, weird colors on that canvas named the twelfth chapter.

"And I saw a Beast coming up out of the sea." And as we read the words we can see him in the gathering shadows of the evening, himself a Darker Shadow, slimy and dripping, huge, unearthly, combining all conceivable beastliness in himself, lithe and leopard-like for all his ponderousness, with feet like a bear and the mouth of a lion, his head covered

with diademed horns! "The Beast" is the subject of this section. (Referred to 14: 9, 11; 15: 2; 16: 2, 10, 13; 17: 3; 19: 19, 20; 20: 4, 10.)

And this Beast is no ordinary beast, as I have said. As we shall see, I hope, he represents the Roman Empire; but, however that may be, he is the minion of the Dragon, from whom he receives his authority and power. He also assumes the prerogatives of Deity, and without weariness tramples upon the Church.

This Beast rising out of the sea is aided by a second Beast, rising out of the land, a Beast unlike the first, lamb-like in appearance, yet really a serpent at heart, and referred to in later portions of this section as the false prophet (16: 13; 19: 20; 20: 10), for it is his business to make the earth and them that dwell

therein to worship the First Beast. And to do this, as we read on we learn, he works signs and wonders, making even the image of the Beast to breathe and speak.[1]

We shall learn that this false prophet represents the provincial priests set for the promotion of the worship of the Roman emperors.

But, whatever we think of these features in this section of the Book, we have it made perfectly clear to us that neither the Beast from the Sea nor the Beast from the Land wanders aimlessly or blunderingly. They are guided by a demonish instinct, and they are tormentors of both "small and great, rich and poor, free and bond," making them subject to the rule of the Beast and forcing them to receive his mark if they are

[1] 13: 15.

to live, buy, or sell upon the earth.[2] *The thirteenth chapter can be understood only in the light of chapters two and three, where we hear of the death of Antipas, the suffering of Christians, the flashing of Cæsar's sword.*

The Seer thus enables the Church to see that he appreciates its strait. He says as much in chapters two and three. He himself has felt the power of the Beast. And in this prophecy he confronts the Beast and unmasks him and makes apparent both his inspiration and presumption; and he does this deliberately because he is to make clear to the Church the futility of the raging of the Beast against God and His anointed.

It is well to note that the Seer does not give the visions of the Beast until he has enabled the Church to look upon the Throne in Heaven. He first helps

[2] 13: 17.

his readers to see that God's righteousness is invincible because it is the expression of Holy Love, a love that never faileth. Then they are ready to look upon the Beast at close range.

Not only so; he will not let the Church look too long at the slimy Beast. In chapter fourteen we have the vision of the blessed ones who have refused the mark of the Beast. What a glorious company they are!

Then comes the daring word! They are to overcome—the followers of Christ! An angel flying in mid-heaven proclaims the Eternal Gospel and calls upon every nation and tongue to fear God and not man, not the Beast, for the hour of judgment has come.

A second angel follows, announcing the impending doom of Babylon, the empire of the Beast.

A third angel follows the second, saying, "If any man worshipeth the Beast and his image, and receiveth the mark on his forehead, or upon his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God."

These three angels are followed by the vision of the Harvester who hurls his sickle to the earth and reaps it at the word of the angel who comes out of the temple in heaven. A second angel comes forth from the temple carrying a sharp sickle; and still another coming out from the altar cries, "Send forth thy sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for the grapes are fully ripe."

What a splendid angelic succession is this! How glorious these denizens of the sky! All of them shining, pure, god-like against the foulness of the Beast!

Truly, they that are with us are more than they that be against us! The heavens are full of shining hosts if we but had eyes to see! Yet the Seer is not done. Indeed, he has just begun. Immediately there stand before us, majestic, awful, panoplied in light, seven gigantic angels holding golden bowls full of the Wrath of God. It is an overwhelming spectacle, and as we gaze we see the vision of a multitude no man can number standing on, as it were, a sea of glass.

The dominion of the Beast is at an end. The seven last plagues are about to visit the earth. The heavenly chorus has ceased its song. There is silence everywhere. The Seer does not say so, but the reader feels that it is so.

After an interval the Seer looks again, and, behold, seven angels clothed in pure and white linen, girded about their

breasts with golden girdles, come out of the temple in heaven and receive from one of the four living creatures seven golden bowls, full of the Wrath of God! God's judgments hurry forward. The bowls are poured forth upon the earth, the sea, the springs of water, the sun, the empire of the Beast. A comparison of 15: 5-7 and 16: 18 with 11: 19 and 4: 6-11 will show how the several parts of the Book are related and how they help the interpreter to its meaning.

The judgment on the Empire of the Beast, which represents one form of the Dominion of the Dragon, centers in the destruction of the city of Babylon, which is the heart and nerve-center of the empire and which is symbolized under the figure of a Woman on a Scarlet Beast; and she is represented as drunk on the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. What

the Seer sees is described in chapters seventeen and eighteen. The fall of Babylon is followed by the Hallelujah Chorus. And this, in turn, by the vision of the Conquering Christ riding forth on a white horse. And this by the vision of the angel in the sun announcing the Supper of God.

Thus this cycle ends with the overthrow of the Beast. Strictly speaking, I think chapter twenty must be taken as part of this cycle, for not until then do we have the overthrow of the Dragon and the vision of the White Throne.

To catch the sublime outlook of the Seer it is only necessary to trace this cycle in merest outline—to pass from the vision of the Dragon to the vision of the Beast from the Sea to the vision of the Beast from the Land, through the succession of angels to the vision of the

falling city of Babylon, to the vision of the chorus, to the vision of the conquering Christ, to the vision of the Angel and the Dragon, until at last we come to the vision of the Great White Throne. There are three steps to the climax of this cycle. The first is seen at the chorus, the second at the conquering Christ, the last at the Great White Throne.

III.

I have said that the Beast represents the Roman Empire and the second Beast, the False Prophet, the priesthood interested in the furtherance of the imperial cult. Of course, other interpretations have been given.

Suppose we state the case hypothetically. Let us try to reconstruct in a few of its features the spirit and condition of the age in which the Seer lived.

Perchance without much difficulty we shall find light on this entire section of the Book.

We know now, thanks to a whole company of laborious scholars, that the Church in a very few decades after the ascension of our Lord came face to face with the Roman Empire as an antagonistic force. We know that that empire was earthly, material, brutal. It had nothing in common with the spirit of the Kingdom of God. We know of the terrible persecutions through which the Christians passed. We know how towering were the ambitions of the emperors. We know how they arrogated to themselves divine powers. We know that it was necessary for the Roman citizens to acknowledge the divinity of these Cæsars or stand stamped as disloyal, as traitors. Many documents have been unearthed

to show how necessary it was to have one's devotion to the empire certified. We know that temples were built for the worship of the emperors. We know, further, that these emperors loved the empire simply for what it could yield to them. We know that Nero, who had passed out of life by a violent death, was expected to come back and resume his rule in Rome. This superstition was widespread and wild. We know, on the other hand, that the converts to Christianity were often greatly embarrassed in their loyalty to Christ both because of social and commercial ties. We know that some of them lapsed, that all of them were watched, and that many of them died because of their refusal to make any kind of a compromise.

These are a few of the conditions that we *know* existed.

Now, as we read the chapters twelve to twenty of the Book in the light of these facts, we see that we have an actual historical situation reflected there as certainly as we have in chapters two and three. If any one has any doubt of this in the broad, I urge him to read such books as Ramsay's and Deissmann's in reconstruction of that time, or such a commentary as Swete's on Revelation, and especially his chapter on "Anti-Christ in Asia Minor."

But turn now to chapter seventeen. There we have Babylon described as a drunken woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast having seven heads and ten horns (17: 3). A horrible vision, so repulsive, so hideous that the Seer tells us he was filled with wonder by it. The angel-guide explains the mystery of the Beast to him in verses 7-18.

I think we shall understand his explanation more readily if we keep in mind what must have been clear to his first readers, that sometimes the Seer uses the symbol of the Beast (*i. e.*, the first Beast) to represent the Roman Empire as a whole (13: 1), sometimes to represent the city of Rome (17: 9), and at other times to indicate a single emperor who embodied fully the spirit of the Beast (17: 8; 13: 14; 13: 17; 13: 18). If this emperor was Nero, then we have a further clearing of difficulties, for, as has just been said, after Nero's death it was expected that he would appear again and ascend the Roman throne. The fear of his return was widespread.

This is the angel's explanation of the mystery of the scarlet-covered beast (17: 9). The seven heads are mountains. The suggestion of Rome is needed to guide

the reader (17: 9); but at once the Seer adds, "And they are seven kings" (17: 10). The seven heads are seven kings. (See 13: 1.) "Five are fallen, the one is, the other is yet to come; and when he cometh he must continue a little while." The Seer writes thus in the time of the sixth emperor. If we turn back to 13: 3 we read, "And I saw one of his heads as though it had been smitten to death; and his death-stroke was healed; and the whole earth wondered after the beast." The tradition that Nero was alive again would explain this text, and also 17: 8: "The beast that thou sawest was, and is not and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition." Also this: "And the beast that was, and is not is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven" (*i. e.*, he has reigned as one of the seven).

The Seer evidently feels that the discerning reader will not be confused by his speaking of the empire as the Beast and again of a given emperor as the Beast, for the emperor was the empire; and, as he indicates, they had little love for Rome save as Rome gave them opportunity to satiate their lust for power (17: 16).

Possibly the ten horns refer to contemporary or to future rulers who receive their authority from Rome (17: 12). I think that the Seer's explanation here must be referred back to the ten horns in 13: 1.

If, then, the Beast symbolizes the Roman Empire as embodied in the emperor we have an understanding of 13: 5-10 and also 13: 16-18.

If, now, we look more closely at what is said of Rome under the symbols of

Babylon and the Woman on the Scarlet-colored Beast, we get further light.

It was a fine insight that enabled the Seer to speak of Rome as a harlot with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication. And his picture of her is consistent and detailed. She is gaudily dressed, decked with costly jewels, is drunken but continues to drink out of a full beaker, until at last she is left naked and desolate. (17: 2-6; 17: 15-16.) This woman is identified with Babylon (18: 2-7).

From verse 8 on we have a closer view of Babylon, and it is without doubt the empire as centered in the city of Rome the Seer has described to him in the hour of its doom.

The passage must be read to be appreciated.

IV.

If I am right in identifying the empire of the Beast with the Roman Empire, and modern scholars seem pretty well agreed on this point, then we should note that, while in the letters the Seer tries to fasten the attention of his readers not upon the sword of Cæsar but upon the two-edged sword of Christ, not upon its troubles but upon the sufficiency of their Lord, here he is facing fearlessly the antagonistic forces, the Beast in all his malignity. *The Book has moved forward.* And the Seer feels that it can be made perfectly clear to his readers that neither the Empire of the Beast nor the Dominion of the Dragon can prevail against the Kingdom of Christ. And history makes clear, as Bishop Westcott has indicated, that the history of the Roman Empire from the beginning of

the Christian Epoch was a decline and fall, while the Christian Kingdom was a victorious progress.[3] We can see this now. But the Seer wanted his fellow-Christians to feel that the rage of the Beast was in vain. And as the reader of this section climbs step by step to the vision of the White Throne he, too, can not but feel that this is so.

But this section must stand for more than this. It is essentially an uncompromising protest against any compromise on the part of Christians with the imperial cult. The same fierce demand for fidelity to the Lord is made throughout these chapters as in the letters to the Churches (chapters two and three). We must not miss this point. The Beast demands recognition on pain of death; but immediately the Seer ushers in one

[3] "The Epistles of John," pp. 250-282.

angel after another who protests against any surrender, on the part of the Christians, any recognition of Cæsar as Christ, or Lord. *And in these large massings of texts we see reflected the struggle between the empire and the Kingdom.*

V.

The first readers of the Book had a vast advantage over the present-day readers of the Book. They knew the conditions in which they lived, of which the Seer writes. We have to learn those conditions to reconstruct the life of that time. The average reader of Revelation is thus at a very remarkable disadvantage, being wholly unacquainted with the historical setting of the Book, and easily becomes lost in its multiplied symbols or at least must give no little time and thought to an understanding of these

things. This is exceedingly unfortunate for the Seer also. He does not easily have his way with us. He labors at a disadvantage. For instance, the lessons of these chapters, twelve to twenty, are simple enough once we master the language in which they have been written. But we must learn the language first. Hence we have given no little time to *reading* meanings that ought to be *felt* rather than simply deciphered. The simple message of the Seer was level to the humblest intelligence. He was not speaking esoterically or for a favored few, but to toilers and bondmen. He was saying to them simply that he knew how hard-pressed they were. He knew how persistent Rome was. He knew, also, that the persecutions through which they were passing were hell-born. YET THERE MUST BE NO COMPROMISE. The

Nicolaitans and all their kith and kin were traitors to the Lord. Besides, the enemies of Christ shall not prevail.

Of course, in this section of the Book the Seer touches upon one of the profound mysteries, spiritual antagonism. I do not think we are justified in thinking that the Seer thought of this as exhausting itself in the bloody efforts of Rome. In fact he makes it perfectly clear that long after the Beast had been cast into the Lake of Fire the Dragon continued on in his devilish resistance to the Divine Will. This spiritual antagonism is a mysterious fact. But we are all familiar with it. The good is everywhere menaced. As Paul says, we fight not simply against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of darkness.

I say all of this is simple enough.

But the pity is that we are not left free to feel the eloquence, the splendor of the Seer's presentation of his message. It is too bad if in our effort to determine just what personage in history is indicated by the Beast we fail to see the awful sliminess, the monstrous repulsiveness of evil. It is certainly reason for deepest regret if we do not feel, as we gaze on the Seer's sublime pictures, the wonderful majesty and the glory of righteousness, the beauty of holiness—if we do not see everywhere the splendor of the Divine Presence.

We simply miss the spiritual significance of the Book if we do not sit quietly and reverently before the sublime visions given therein. There is no comment that does not somehow spoil their beauty or turn them into prose.

For, if we will take our stand with

the Seer in the gathering shadows of the evening on some rocky promontory of Patmos after the hard day in the quarries, we shall not simply see the Beast rising out of the sea. That we shall see. But we shall see much more. We shall see the multitude of the redeemed who have gained the victory over the Beast clothed in white and crowned. We shall see Babylon, drunken and beastly and insolent, falling like a stone cast into the sea by an angel standing on the battlements of heaven. But we shall see more. We shall see the great multitude in heaven singing songs of victory and rejoicing in the knowledge that "the Lord our God the Almighty reigneth." We shall see Him whose eyes are a flame of fire, upon whose head are many diadems, whose garments are sprinkled with blood, whose name is the Word of God, who rules the

nations with a rod of iron, who hath inscribed on His shield and His girdle, "King of kings and Lord of lords." We shall see the angel standing in the sun, the soul in the frame of the material. We shall see above the smoke of the Pit, above the strife of the Earth, the White Throne, a Throne without a stain, upon which in the sufficiency of His power sits the Holy Love, God, our Father, whose glory hath shone for all of us in the face of Jesus Christ.

And if the increasing splendor of these visions does not break upon us, we have not read the Book understandingly, for the faith the Seer delivers to the saints is, that God reigneth and He shall prevail.

THE BOOK AND THE RETURNING CHRIST.

THE entire prophecy of the Apocalypse rests upon the fundamental thought of the personal return of the Lord. As the proper theme of the entire book, this prophetic fundamental thought is explicitly announced from the beginning; and where in the epilogue the deepest relation of the entire revelation is once more summarily presented, there it is repeated in the words, "I come quickly," as also, then, on the other hand, the entire answer of all believers to the divine revelation given in the prophetical book is compressed into one word expressing the longing for the Lord's return: "Come."—*Dusterdieck, "Revelation."*

No greater need presses upon the Church of to-day than that of gaining a realizing scene of the real and abiding presence of the living Lord as a powerful ally whom nothing can vanquish. A distant Christ will give a discouraged Church; a dead Christ will give a dead Church. A Christ who is present will give a Church bounding with hope; a Christ who is living will give a Church pulsating with life; a Christ who is supreme in the spiritual realm, and who is operating the spiritual forces at His command for the establishment of His Kingdom on earth, will give a Church radiant with hope concerning the future of the world.—*Campbell, "The Presence."*

THE BOOK AND THE RETURNING CHRIST.

THE Kingdom of God in the thought of the Old Testament prophets was a conception that stood for the complete sovereignty of God over all life, and yet with even the greatest of them it was never quite freed from national and racial restrictions. In the thought of Christ it was universalized and spiritualized, and has come eventually to mean a society made up of men and women living in the power of a simple but mighty faith in God, with a spirit of brotherliness towards each other. Neither racial nor national barriers have any place in it. The pattern of this

Kingdom lies clear in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Parables of Christ.

Now, as we seek to determine what the Book has to say about this idea of the Kingdom, I think we shall do well to put a specific question to our minds: Does the Book of Revelation hold the premillennial conception of the Kingdom of God?

What do we mean by the premillennial conception of the Kingdom?

Premillennialism takes on a variety of forms. It varies from the more spiritualized type, which emphasizes simply the imminence of Christ's return to the earth, to the crasser and more materialistic type which represents the nth degree of literalism. We need not be concerned to dwell upon the crudities of interpretation that belong to a decadent Judaism. Let us rather try to determine whether or not the cardinal characteristics com-

mon to all premillennialism are in harmony with the ruling ideas of Christianity and of the Book.

First, Premillennialism thinks of the Kingdom of God not as come, but as to come in the future. It does not belong to this æon or age.

Second, The Kingdom is to come not by gradual progress from achievement to achievement, but after a great crisis, when the heavens and earth shall be shaken by disaster and revolution, and the descent of Christ.

Third, the Church is to witness for Christ throughout the world, to witness that men may come to know the gospel claims, not that they may accept them. Premillennialism scoffs at the thought of Christianizing the world, or the thought of a Christian civilization, and has no place for the question, "What would Jesus do?"

Fourth, Premillennialism teaches that things will go from bad to worse in the world until the blackness of darkness shall come upon all humankind. You can see the night shadows gathering now, for we live in a growing dusk.

Fifth, Premillennialism teaches that Christ will come in bodily presence at the hour of supreme crisis (which may be now—who can say?), and He will rescue the righteous and set up His Kingdom upon the earth, thus ushering in the Millennium—which may be thought of as a literal one thousand years, or as an indefinite period of time, for even these literalists are not utterly lacking in imagination in a small way.

Let us look a little more closely at these positions.

"The Kingdom is future." Jesus said, "Lo, the Kingdom is in your midst"

or "the Kingdom is within you." Paul insisted that the Kingdom was not meat or drink or any materiality, but a personal fellowship of man with God. "The Kingdom is not meat and drink, but righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost." The prevalent New Testament teaching is that the Kingdom has come, is here, and shall come.

"The Kingdom is to come by crisis." Jesus said the Kingdom is like seed sown broadcast by the farmer—ideals, ideas, inspirations, leavening life, as leaven lifts the measure of meal. The Kingdom is like the seed of mustard which, cast into the ground, grows to be a great tree filling the earth—the point of view of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. Yet all progress is by revolution as well as evolution, by leaps and bounds as well as by growth day and night. So when we turn

over to the 24th and 25th chapters of Matthew we find that his thought is absorbed with the catastrophic conception of the Kingdom. He is thinking, apparently, of the collapse of the Jewish State, of the stormy centuries of the Gentiles, of the consummation of all things. It is difficult to say how much the future was foreshortened in our Lord's vision. Here again we need to remind ourselves that the time sequence is not so important as the moral sequence. But what kind of exegesis is it that can read the 24th chapter of Matthew only by ignoring the 13th. Read together, we can see that the consummation of all things comes not as a leap from the clouds, but as the climactic eventuation of causes and forces resident in the heart and thought of Christendom.

Premillennialism teaches that the

Church is to witness to the gospel throughout the world, not that the world may accept the gospel necessarily, but that the world may know what the gospel claims are.

Yet this is to overlook all that our Lord had to say about life-problems and the meaning of His teaching for certain conditions. Paul well said that all thinking was to be brought into obedience to Christ. His missionary career was a reconstruction of all life in keeping with Christian principles. If this is not so, it is difficult to know what to do with his great Corinthian letters. Moreover, it is hardly likely that all Christian preaching has been wide of the mark. And the objective of all Christian preaching has been the recalcitrant human will.

"The world is growing worse, and

will continue to do so until the returning Christ shall turn the tide."

How preposterous that sounds to us when we think of the life of the multitudes of slaves in the Gentile world of Christ's time as compared with the life of the common people to-day; or when we think of the free play of Christian ideas throughout the world to-day compared with the sodden condition of humanity in Paul's time, both within the Roman Empire and without, especially without. Yet more important, even, than this is the consideration that such a philosophy of life adhered to consistently would have drugged the human race these last nineteen hundred years into helpless, useless, blighted, idle waiting instead of releasing it to a healthy and rational activity.

How different Christian history would

have been if the premillennial view had dominated the thought of the races of Christendom.

Lastly, "Christ will come to rescue the world." The Scriptures and the creeds always speak of Christ's second coming, as He invariably did, evidently, as a coming in judgment. All history moves to a consummation—tares and wheat—and then the harvest.

Thus the Christian teaching, taken as a whole, does not seem to be friendly to the premillennial view of the Kingdom, a view that has been determinating and controlling in so much of the interpretation of the Book of Revelation. Some Premillennialists, feeling this difficulty, have sought to obviate it by holding that much of the teaching of Jesus (for instance, the Lord's Prayer and the parables) has no meaning for the present

dispensation. We may not appeal to it. It applies to a coming æon! Strange, is it not, that the Master so ill-timed His words? But shifting will not do. If Jesus' teaching was meant for a future age rather than the present, then Jesus must stand condemned as incapable of making Himself understood; and He the greatest of teachers.

No, this will not do. The prevailing view of scholars has come to be that the eschatological interpretation of Christianity, *i. e.*, the attempt to make it a chart of the future ages, or "last things," can not stand. Christianity does throw light upon the destiny of the individual and the race, but it does so because it is a word of life, speaking of God, and the soul, and seeking to help the soul out of the Far Country back to the Father's House. But when one turns from the

bewildering charts and maps and labyrinthine discussions about æons and dispensations and literalistic readings of premillennialism to the Sermon on the Mount, the Fourth Gospel, or the Book of Acts, it is as when, aroused from some tortuous dream of the night, one looks out of his window and sees the sky flooded with the light of the morning. It is a renewal of life and hope and sanity.

Now, as to the Book of Revelation. I have already (see the Introductory Chapter) pointed out that its real affinity is with the Fourth Gospel rather than with the apocalypticism of the later Judaism. And I again remind you of the significance of the Seer's free handling of the apocalyptic teaching. There is only one explanation of that: He moves with a greater freedom in a roomier conception of the Kingdom than the typical apocalyptist.

Dobschutz in his admirable book on the "Eschatology of the Gospels" reviews the teaching of Jesus as a whole to show that the moral teaching rather than that concerning the last things constitutes the essence of Christianity, and does so not simply because the ethical teaching bulks much more largely than the other, but chiefly because the eschatological teaching is "transmuted." That is, the Kingdom which was conceived by the later Judaism as future and external is conceived by Jesus as present and inward, and all the teaching is handled freely. Precisely so is it in the case of the Seer. The letters to the Churches in the second and third chapters show that he held to the inward and present, *i. e.*, to the spiritual view of the Kingdom. I do not believe—I can not lead myself to believe—that the Book of Revelation

favors the premillennial view of the Kingdom any more than the Fourth Gospel does.

If there is any doubt on this score, re-examine the teaching of the Book as a whole, its conception of Christ as a Present and Sufficient Grace, as Savior and as Judge. (See the chapter on "The Book and Christ.")

The Seer held that a power equal to the need of the world had been released by the Cross of Christ, and he was not one to make the Cross of no effect. Read again those passages dealing with the actual situation of the Church and see how he thought of the Church as a witness to the gospel to the end that the whole world might be saved. Take a single instance to illustrate his thought of the Church. The compromising of the members of the Thyatirian Church

was terrible to him, as it meant the lapsing back of the whole Church into Paganism. Does not that show that John looked forward to the Christianization of the world? Then, too, as shall yet more clearly appear, as with his Master, the Kingdom to him was both present and to come.

But take a single passage of the Book—chapter 20: 1-10.

"There you have an excellent example of the premillennial view of the Kingdom," the premillennialist asserts. "There is a literal dragon, a literal angel, a literal chain, a literal pit, a literal Christ. Following the literal imprisonment of the dragon is to come a literal reign of Christ upon the earth in bodily presence, disturbed for a literal time once more by this literal dragon, who is finally to be literally killed."

"Now," says the chiliast, the premillennialist, the literalist, "how are you going to get around such a Scripture as this?"

Let us say at once there is never a question of getting *around* a Scripture if we are really interpreting Scripture. The question is always one of getting *into* the Scripture, and the relevant question always is, What does the Scripture mean? Not what might it mean? Nor what may it be made to mean? But what ideas did it hold for the writer and for the Spirit who was inspiring the writer?

I *can* conceive the passage as the literalist does. I *can* say that the passage teaches that after an interval of time Christ shall return in bodily presence to the earth, imprison the Devil for a season, and later destroy him, meanwhile setting up a Kingdom upon the earth.

Yet such an interpretation, clean-cut and simple, runs against some difficulties.

Swete says: "When Doctor Charles writes ("Eschatology," p. 439), 'The martyrs . . . reign with Christ personally on earth for a thousand years (20: 4-6), with Jerusalem as the center of the Kingdom,' he introduces into the eschatology of this passage ideas collected from Cc. 5: 10, 20: 9, and 21: 10." Even so careful a writer as C. Anderson Scott says: "This is the only passage in the New Testament which clearly sets forth a doctrine of the millennium, *i. e.*, of a period in which 'Christ will reign in bodily presence upon earth for a thousand years.'" But look carefully at these Scriptures. 5: 10 makes the martyrs' chorus refer to the redeemed power that has come to them through Christ. Even that passage does not speak of them

as returning to earth in bodily presence to reign. That Christ is reigning upon the earth now is certainly one of the Seer's great convictions. 5: 10 says nothing that requires us to think of the martyrs reigning upon the earth as involving a return on their part to earth. 20: 4 says the martyrs reign with Christ a thousand years. Where? Upon the earth? Swete says, "But St. John does not commit himself to a reign upon the earth." He certainly does not in this passage, 20: 4. And to go the length of saying, as Scott does, that 20: 4 teaches that Christ will reign in bodily presence, is to read something into the Scriptures not really there.[1]

[1] That the millennial reign is to be inaugurated by the visible coming of Christ and is to proceed as a visible administration of Christ and the risen saints is not said. It is a fair question whether it was thought by the revelator. Those, therefore, who would make a positive tenet of the idea of a future visible reign of Christ upon this earth must

If we read on we find that after the martyrs reign an indefinite time there comes a time of confusion and a time when Satan deceives the nations until fire falls from heaven and devours the enemies of the saints. This would seem to indicate that the forces destructive of evil are still above the earthly level. Not the martyrs, not an earthly-placed Christ, but fire from heaven does to death Satan and his minions. I am reminded of one of Charles Brown's comments on the Book, "To be literal is to be lost."

I must not dwell upon the textual difficulties of the clean-cut premillennial view.

I find very real embarrassments in

build upon a very scanty foundation. They have not so much of a foundation as one definite expression in a single passage of a single Biblical writer, but only what may possibly have been the thought of the revelator in penning a single passage."—*Sheldon, "New Testament Theology," pp. 169-70.*

trying to accept this bodily return of Christ to reign upon the earth, with His capital at Jerusalem.[2] I have stated some of them already: The whole conception runs counter to the Scriptural teaching concerning the Kingdom, its nature and progress, the Church and its mission, and the purpose of Christ's return. Moreover, the Incarnation was once, and was not a failure. Christ finished His work when here in bodily form so far as it could be done in the body. It is difficult to conceive why He should become reincarnated. I mention these considerations simply to show that this reading, so simple and apparently so final, has

[2] The Old Testament prophecies took into their purview the coming of Messiah, *i. e.*, the First Advent. Messiah's kingdom was to be for ever and ever. T. M. Thomas, in his recent book, "The Coming Presence," says: "The idea of Christ's bodily reign on earth is absolutely foreign to the thought of Paul." (41, p. 165.) He speaks of this conception as being opposed "to the whole trend of New Testament teaching."

both exegetical and philosophical difficulties apparently insuperable.

Now, if this interpretation is so unsatisfactory, is there not another that will be perfectly fair to the text and that, nevertheless, yields a conception of the consummation of the Kingdom more consonant with the ethics of Jesus and the ruling ideas of Christianity.

I have no hesitation in giving an affirmative answer, and I suggest that we shall see how to conceive the Seer's teaching concerning the consummation if we recall how he speaks of the present activity of Christ. A literal interpretation of the Seer's teaching concerning the Lord's relation to the Church in Asia Minor in his (the Seer's) time will land the reader in utter confusion. That is, if the way to understand what he says about the Church in the world is to take

his imagery as symbolical, let us follow the same method in trying to understand what he has to say about the consummation. And let us not forget that the Seer, as I have already said, handled all the current apocalyptic forms freely, much as the Master handled the coin of the current speech of His day.

So if the literalist asks not how we are going to get around this Scripture, but how are we going to read it, I reply, Just as we read the first chapter. Why should we treat the Seer's imagery in the first chapter as a sublime symbolism bodying forth spiritual truth, pictorially representing spiritual truth not to explain away, but to make the truth yet more vividly real, and then treat the twentieth chapter in the most literal manner? When the Seer says that Jesus was present in Asia Minor, we do not think

that he means in a bodily presence. Yet the Seer so pictures Him. We do not think that he meant that Jesus literally had brass feet by which He might be identified. Nevertheless the Seer was insisting upon Christ as really present, and he was also insisting (by the brass feet) that He is the "Strong Son of God."

How shall we read this twentieth chapter? Just as all readers read the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth chapters. The interpreters of the Seer have varied greatly in their opinions as to what the Seer intended the beasts to represent. Some have thought he meant the pope, others Luther, others modern business men, etc. No one, so far as I am aware, has ever contended that the Seer meant us to believe that he had seen literal beasts becrowned and be-

horned stalking the earth and demanding to be worshiped by men and women.

How shall we read this passage? As we read that Scripture which speaks of Satan's throne in Pergamos, and that other passage which speaks of his synagogue as being in Philadelphia. Of course, no one imagines that Satan read the Scriptures from week to week to a deceived multitude in Philadelphia. At least I hope no one believes any such thing. And, of course, we ought to read the Book consistently, not literally here and symbolically there. Moreover, the Seer has done as much to give us a clue

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NOTE.—On Good Friday, 1906, I had the advantage of seeing Pergamos under the guidance of Wilhelm Darpfeld. Actual inspection of the place suggests that Satan's Throne (Rev. 2: 13) can only have been the altar of Zeus. No other shrine of the hill city was visible to such a great distance and could therefore rank so typically as the representative of Satanic heathendom."—*Deissmann, "Light from the Ancient East," p. 280.*

to his meaning as we have a right to ask him to do, for a writer has reason to expect something of his readers. He says, "I do not mean a literal dragon—I mean that Old Serpent." He is, in other words, speaking symbolically. I certainly do not believe that the Seer means to say that a literal angel literally put literal handcuffs on the literal devil. Yet just that is what a recent writer[3] on Premillennialism maintains; and he suggests that this angel was a heavenly sheriff! Verily, "to be literal is to be lost."

I do not wonder that men easily drop into literalism when reading realistic literature. You can see that splendid angel seize the dragon by his slimy neck and fling him into the bottomless pit (what a conception—falling forever and yet never reaching a place for one's feet!);

[3] C. F. Wimberly, "Is the Devil a Myth," p. 150.

and you can hear him slam to the door and chain it!

The Seer is saying again that not only does the Lord God Omnipotent reign, but that all of his enemies shall be utterly cast down. Not only so: The Kingdom, so far from being vanquished by the Empire—the Empire which is but the creature of the Dragon—shall yet come to a glorious manifestation. And John's prayer is that that manifestation of the Lord and His Church, the Bridal of the Lamb, may come quickly.

This view reads the passage fairly. The literalist view to which I have referred runs counter to phases of the text to some of the ruling ideas of Christianity, and to the fundamental ideas of the Book of Revelation. It holds that the Dragon's dominion shall be supreme until Christ's return. The literalistic view of the text

referred to above is committed to the conception of an absent Christ and to the dependence of the Kingdom for victory upon the emergence into the world of celestial power not at present operative in human affairs. Now, the Book of Revelation ever emphasizes two truths. First, Christ is here now in human affairs, inspiring, judging, redeeming, conquering. Second, Christ will prevail. The redeeming grace is at work, and the consummation is certain, is being wrought out. The victory is through the Cross, the "blood of the Lamb," not the returning Christ. (12: 11.)

The twentieth chapter does tell of a miraculous leap in the affairs of the Kingdom, yet that leap comes as the climax of the long struggle between the will of the Beast and the Will of God. It is the final crisis in the age-long struggle be-

tween Christ and anti-Christ. The Seer seizes upon vast symbols to suggest the progress of that struggle, mysterious and subtle to all of us. He sees the Dragon cast forth from heaven. He sees him bound in the collapse of the Roman Empire, which to the Seer was, in its deeper meaning, but a minion of the Beast. Finally the Dragon is destroyed. And the Seer, we are justified, I think, in believing, saw this conflict much as his Master did, who in one moment of exultation upon the victorious return of his first witnesses exclaimed, "I see Satan falling from heaven."

I need not dwell longer upon my contention that neither in the twentieth chapter nor in the Book as a whole do we find support for the premillennial view of the Kingdom. But if any one feels disposed to question the soundness of

this contention, let me remind him that the chiliastic view, in spite of the zeal and learning of not a few of its advocates, has never been able to sustain itself.

Harnack in his illuminating article on the Millennium ("Brittanica") points out that the millenarian or chiliastic views which had been taken over by the early Christians from later Judaism were suppressed in the East as early as the latter part of the second century by the rising of a more philosophical theology, and especially by the growing tendency to mysticism. While in the Western Church Augustine's interpretations of the Catholic Church as the Kingdom of Christ pushed the apocalyptic conception to the wall, though through the centuries these chiliastic views lived on in the lower strata of Christian society among those democrats, mystics, mal-

contents, or what not, opposed to the Church of the hierarchy.

Now, in spite of the failing of the chiliastic conception of the Kingdom of Christ to commend itself to the common Christian consciousness after the second century—the time of confusion and theological anarchy and chaos out of which the Church soon emerged—the Book of Revelation recovered its authority in the Eastern Church by the beginning of the Middle Ages, while in the Western Church, Harnack says, as to its canonicity and apostolic authorship no doubts were ever entertained.

Here are two important facts: The chiliastic or apocalyptic view of the Kingdom lapsing, and at the same time the Book of Revelation steadily and increasingly claiming the recognition of the Church universal. How shall we explain

this situation? I venture to say that it is but one of several unmistakable evidences that the Book of Revelation, so far from lending comfort to any materialistic or literalistic or chiliastic view of the Kingdom, is the most mystical and spiritual book of the New Testament, not excepting either the Fourth Gospel or the Epistle to the Hebrews.[4]

[4] Dr. Frank M. Thomas's sane and interesting book on "The Coming Presence" (Revell) did not come out until after my manuscript had been completed, so I was not able to make any use of it, save by the references herein given. However, having read it carefully, I would not wish to modify my statement as given above. I do wish, though, to commend the book to all devout students of the Scriptures. It shows both the providential preparation for Christ's teaching in the apocalyptic teachings of later Judaism, and also how those teachings were lifted up by the Master and, as Dobschutz puts it, were "transmuted." It also makes clear what is confused in the minds of many, that the Master held in His thought the consummation as distinct from such crises as, *e. g.*, the Fall of Jerusalem. It is an excellent piece of exposition, especially of the Pauline and Synoptic texts.

THE BOOK AND THE BETTER COUNTRY.

THEY desire a better country, that is an heavenly.—*Hebrews.*

A city throned upon a height behold,
Wherein no foot of man as yet has trod;
The City of Man's life fulfilled in God.
Bathed all in light, with open gates of gold,
Perfect the City is in tower and street;
And there a Palace for each mortal waits,
Complete and perfect, at whose outer gates
An Angel stands its occupant to greet.
Still shine, O patient City on the height,
The while our race in hut and hovel dwells.
It hears the music of thy heavenly bells
And its dull soul is haunted by thy light.
Lo, one, the Son of Man, hath heard thy call
And the dear Christ hath claimed thee for us all.

—*Phillips Brooks.*

THE BOOK AND THE BETTER COUNTRY.

And now at last we have come in the company of the Seer and the angels to the great and high mountain commanding a view of the sweet and blessed country, "the better country" which eager hearts have expected since the days of Abraham. And inasmuch as the Seer is manifestly more than a maker of conundrums, and more than merely an ordinary apocalyptist, we ought to let him speak in his own fine way of this land which by most of us is seen only afar off, indeed, but which lay all about the Seer, making tolerable the rigor of the quarries of lonely Patmos, filling his night of exile with music. Again and

again he has brought us some token from it, a word, a fragrance, a bit of song, the glimpse of a throne, the sight of millions of its inhabitants clothed in white, wearing crowns. He has taken us from the first by a climbing path, giving us a glimpse now and again of things impossible to describe. At last we have reached the summit, and the whole land lies before us with the City of God coming down out of heaven, glorious as pure gold and radiant as the sun.

This splendid vision, which breaks upon us in the twenty-first and the twenty-second chapters, as if by a sudden turn in the road we had been brought round the shoulder of a mountain, we should have been expecting, for the Seer has had it in mind from the beginning. Indeed, it might be said that he has written his Book to set this vision in a

right perspective, for surely his deep, pastoral purpose was to fire the hearts of the fainting Christians of his time with such a passion for the holy city that they would gird themselves anew to the task of transforming the Empire of the Beast into the Kingdom of the Lamb! They were not to stand forever trembling at the sight of Cæsar's dripping sword. It was for them to conquer and to reign, and their lives were to go forth to all the earth in a river of blessing. This glorious climax has been suggested again and again by words, by images, by promises, and also by the second of the Seer's two fundamental conceptions, that Christ is to prevail. As has been said, the Seer's thought moves around two poles: First, he is always insisting upon Christ as a present and sufficient grace; and secondly, he is saying over and over again that He

shall prevail. The Kingdom has come. The Kingdom shall come. It has come, but it shall come yet more gloriously. It is a seed planted in the ground. It shall become a tree and fill the whole world with its comfort, the richness of its fragrance, the abundance of its fruitage. He is always, as the Prophet of the Older Order, asking his friends to look up and see all about them the horses and chariots of the Lord; and likewise he is saying to his friends, if they will be faithful even unto the shedding of blood, they shall see the City of God coming down out of heaven. This becomes clearer when we contrast these closing chapters with the opening chapters of the Book. In the opening chapters we see the Church weak and fainting. Yet it is expected to overcome. That command is laid upon it. To that end the Master Himself calls to

His Church. At the close of the Book we see this same Community of Redeemed Ones empowered, radiant, reigning in the earth.

So intent is John upon the future of the Kingdom that he seems to lose sight, almost to lose sight, of the individual Christian. Certainly there is no more glorious vision in the Book, unless it be the vision of Heaven given in the fourth and fifth chapters, than this vision of the Consummation of the Kingdom which pictures the issue of the conflict between the Dominion of the Dragon and the Kingdom of the Lamb.

Let us turn, then, to a more detailed study of this closing section of the Book.

"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." (21:2.) To conceive of

the New Community under the symbol of a bride, though not altogether original with the Seer (Isa. 61: 10–62: 5) was a stroke of genius, especially as this is contrasted with the symbol of the harlot, which is used to suggest the essential character of the Empire of the Beast. The Empire of the Beast was earthly, material, sensual, lustful. What more wonderfully accurate symbol than that of the harlot could have been chosen! The new society, heaven-born, aspiring, hopeful, pure, is symbolized by a bride! The redeemed ones, the Kingdom, conceived as a bride, as an army, as a city—how rich in imagination the Seer was! This symbol of the bride should be studied in contrast with the symbol used for the Empire of the Beast. Both Babylon and the New Jerusalem are shown to the Seer by one of the Seven Angels of

Judgment (17: 1, 21: 9); Babylon is seen from the wilderness (17: 3), the New Jerusalem from a high mountain (21: 10); Babylon sits upon many waters (peoples) (17: 1), the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven; Babylon is pictured as a harlot, the New Jerusalem as a bride. Consistently the Seer keeps, in his description of Babylon, to the symbol of the harlot. She is dressed in purple and scarlet, decked with gold, precious stones, and pearls; she holds in her hand a beaker of gold full of fornications; she lies drunken on her couch (17: 4-6). While her death, though lamented by seamen, merchants, and kings (18: 9-19), is rejoiced over in heaven by the redeemed (18: 20–19: 6). With a fine artistry the Seer pitilessly works out the detailed characterization of the Empire of the Beast in that spirit of worldliness which

burns out of the heart all capacity for God. (1 John 2: 15-17.) And a study of this symbol reveals by contrast the beauty and purity set forth under the symbol of the bride.

In chapter 21: 1-8 we get a distant view of the City, and it appears as a bride—pure, hopeful, radiant. And as we look we hear a voice saying: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new." God's purpose in creation—a society of men and women created in His

image, united in fellowship with Him, is realized. All spiritual antagonism has subsided within the new society. God's will has come to pass, and the new society is supreme upon the earth, though apparently it does not include within its glorious company all the population of the earth. (21: 8 and 22: 2.)

But the Seer does not dwell upon the symbol of the bride. It suggests the purity, the aspiration, the hopefulness, and the faithfulness of the new humanity; but it is not enough to convey the full splendor of the Seer's thought of the Kingdom, so he changes from the symbol of the bride to that of an ideal city.

The Seer's use of the symbol of the bride ought forever to have prevented that crass literalism which would have us believe that the Seer is describing a literal city in these chapters. But the New

Jerusalem is as certainly a symbol as the bride, and, if I read aright, supplemental, a further attempt to describe the indescribable.

If in the first verses of the twenty-first chapter (21: 1-8) we get a distant view of the City, in the later verses we get a near view, where the angel points out various details of the City.

It is not necessary to comment at length on the sublime symbolism of this vision of the City.

The Seer sees it coming down from heaven; it is a blaze of glorious light, for Christ is the Light of the World and His people are to shine forth like a city set on a hill; its walls are great and high, for it is a place of refuge, whose gates are always open day and night, for the people are to come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and

sit down in the Kingdom of God; and the gates are angel-guarded to keep the unclean out and to protect those who have entered. Upon its foundations and gates are written the names of the apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel, for the community which this City symbolizes has been gathered through centuries by the toil of prophets as well as apostles; the city lieth four-square, and the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal, for it is the symbol of the fullness and inclusiveness of God's Grace; it is made of all manner of precious stones, for into the Kingdom of God all manner of lives shall be built, and all are precious in God's sight; the gates of whose city is each a pearl! And there is no sun nor moon there, "for the glory of God does lighten it, and the Lamb is the Light thereof." And the inhabitants of the

City are they which have been saved out of all nations, for nothing unclean can enter therein. Through the midst of the City runs the River of the Water of Life, clear as crystal; and on either side of the river is the Tree of Life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

Such is the City of God, the new Society, the Redeemed Community which the Church, under the leadership of the Spirit, is to create.

II.

It seems hardly necessary to say that the Seer in this section is not describing heaven, or the Eternal World; and yet there is no violence in so interpreting this passage, for essentially the life here portrayed is akin to that which he saw when the door in heaven was opened. Still, strictly speaking, this is the coming

civilization which is to fill the earth,[1] displacing the Empire of the Beast. It is the Kingdom of God on earth; but when that is fully come it is to be heaven-like, for in it the will of God is to be all in all, as it is in heaven now.

III.

And this will of God is of the utmost moment in this conception. What the Seer sets before the Church as its task is not a program of social adjustment. That must come, and will. But the Church task is to help bring about a reconciliation between man and God, to help the nations back to the tree of life. I say this is all-important in a right reading of this section and of the Book. The great disconcerting fact in the world

[1] It is a *new* heaven and a *new* earth; the old physical and the old moral order have passed away.

is sin, and sin in the Scriptural view and in the Seer's is a running counter to God's will, and not merely a social maladjustment. In such a time as ours, when men are trying to interpret religion without God, and life by its earthly fragment, and Christianity as a mere social program, I can not insist too emphatically that the Seer's emphasis and point of view are absolutely other. This is not to minimize the social suggestion of this vision of the City of God. That would be foolish, indeed, for perhaps no other single extant writing in all literature has exerted a deeper or wider influence upon the thinking of workers for social betterment than has this vision of the Holy City. Its influence may be traced in hymns, sermons, social philosophy, and the more popular forms of literature. The Book of Revelation as a whole is a

social document. It does more than reflect a social situation in a most important crisis. It sets up social ideals, and is intense with social feeling and all compact of social suggestion. Its fundamental aim is to fire its readers with a desire to create the New Community after the pattern shown in the Sermon on the Mount.

Yet there is a point here to be kept clearly in mind. Christianity is not a religion of social betterment. True, it has steadily and perceptibly made for the humaner modes of life, for the larger brotherhood, for the finer and broader justice. But all this is by-product. The problem of Christianity is the sin problem. Its aim is harmony as between God and man. It recognizes the will of man and seeks to bring this in line with the will of God. As a consequence, all of its

intelligent expositors and representatives have deprecated every attempt to reduce it to a mere social program confined to time. Christianity has always looked out upon two worlds, and it has always looked at the present life under the aspect of eternity; not when it has been true to itself to the depreciation of the present life, but rather, far rather, to the higher value of this present life. For at its best Christianity seeks to help every soul to live now and forever in the power of an endless life. Christianity then seeks, like Abraham, not better pastures, but the "better country," where the will of God is done.

The Book of Revelation has the genius of Christianity. In it you see reflected the evils of the closing days of the Roman Empire. Over it you see the shadow of the Empire of the Beast, the shadow of

sin. The Seer worked day by day as a prisoner for Christ's sake, and just as the sea pounded forever into his ears the fact of his exile, so forever his chain, his stint in the quarries, reminded him of the hard injustices, of the tyranny of the civilization in which he and his brethren lived, a civilization in which human life was cheap and human hope at a minimum. Still, over this Book breaks the light and hope inspired of the Divine Grace. It is a Book of sublime optimism. It preaches a gospel of deliverance from injustice, and also from the bondage of sin. Every worker for social betterment will find in this Book much ground for encouragement, much material for illustration and comparison. Here some things have been made clear. Here one can hear the grinding of the mills of God. Here one is made to feel that a great

justice is over all things. The music of the Book never lets us forget that. For, while the undertone of the Book is a sob, the overtone is a shout of hallelujah. Its optimism is born not of a confidence that social adjustments shall be reached, but of the assurance that sin, the maker of sorrow and tears, shall be done away with and everywhere the discords of earth shall yield to the song of the cherubic hosts, the darkness to light, the strife to peace.

IV.

It should be remarked, also, that much cheap modern comment has spoken as if the Seer had been absorbed with streets of gold and gates of pearl. Nothing could be more unfair. Conspicuous in the glorious City revealed to us are the redeemed throngs, the River of the

Water of Life, the Tree of Life, the open gates, the calling of the Spirit and the Bride; and when we seek the meaning of these aspects of the vision we see that the new community is not "to be ministered unto," but is to be "the servant of all." As Charles Brown has beautifully said: "As surely as she is the Church and the presence of her Lord is in her, will she have pity and power in her heart and her hands for the woes, the thirsts, and the longings of humanity—pity to compensate, and power to heal. In her will be the river of the water of life, because in her midst will be the throne of God and of the Lamb." "Nothing that defileth may enter the City, but surely the defiled thing or person that needs or longs for purity may enter in and be cleansed. Nothing that loveth and maketh a lie may enter, but the people who

are tired of lying and long for truth may enter. It is nowhere said that need may not enter. The gates are surely open, and the angels are there for the very purpose of welcoming such. I hope I am not wrong in my interpretation, but I always regard chapter 22: 17 as a cry uttered by the open gates of the City to people to come into the City of God. The Spirit utters the cry to the heart, the Church proclaims it to the outward ear. There is shelter, safety, cleansing, healing, and peace in the City of God, and through its open gate you may enter in if you will."[2]

If I mistake not, this is essentially the right reading. It would seem little short of willfulness to speak of the Seer's vision of the Holy City as a materialist's conception. There is nothing Moham-

[2] "Heavenly Visions," p. 271.

medan about the Seer's city. Nor does the Seer conceive of Christianity individualistically, as, for instance, some have accused Bunyan of doing. Everywhere the Book is charged with social feeling, and nowhere else in this Book is the Master's Spirit more fully revealed than here in this vision of the City beautiful, splendid, gorgeous in its imagery, yet full of tenderness and graciousness, a place of refuge and light.

The vision of the City is a fitting climax for the whole Book.

The Book opens with an unveiling of Christ in His glory that the Church may go forward in its great task of creating the Kingdom, of bringing down into the work of the world the Grace of God.

The Seer beheld his people cast down and discouraged. They felt their separateness and weakness. He says to them,

"Behold, Christ is with you to help, to heal, to save. He is the Sufficient One."

Then He takes them from the earth level and shows them the Throne of God, that they may see above all the tumult of the world the righteousness of God prevailing, and prevailing by sacrificial love. The Throne of God, in other words, finds its meaning not in its splendor, but in the Slain Lamb.

Having shown them the throne, he looks with them closely at the Malignant Antagonism of the world, in which was manifest an embodiment of the continuous but futile resistance to the will of God.

Finally, he shows this resistance overcome and God's will supreme in his beautiful vision of the City coming down out of heaven from God.

THE SEER.

WE needed not to inquire the way to Heaven, for he had been walking therein for three years. For him no physical theophany was needed who had looked on the face of Jesus. What were mysteries to other men who had only sight were revelations to Him who had vision. A skeptic must question and argue, it is his necessity; a mystic has only to learn and listen, it is his felicity. A mystic gathers truth as a plant absorbs the light, in silence and without effort. His service to his brethren is to ask secrets of the Lord.—*Ian Maclaren, in "The Upper Room."*

THE SEER.

We have come to the end of the Book. Something of its meaning lies before us. We have heard it speak of the Present Christ. We have, by its help, looked out upon the field of the world from the heavenly heights. We have studied the age-long conflict between the Dragon and the Lamb. We have seen from afar the Better Country coming down out of heaven. As we have read, I trust our horizon has receded, our vision has cleared, our hearts have been quickened to a larger faith and love and hope.

By the help of the Book we have looked upon the great Christian facts, the Incarnate Word, the White Throne, the

Splendid City, as they have stood before us in celestial light; we have been led to think much of the atoning love of God, of the enormity of sin, of the malignity of evil, of the beauty of holiness, of the pleasures for evermore at God's right hand.

We lay down the Book and ask ourselves, What manner of man was this Seer who has been speaking to us with such authority and with such mighty appeal? For no one can read this Book without a consciousness of the heart that beats through it, of the mind that utters itself after much brooding, of the personality everywhere felt yet nowhere thrust between us and the message he has for the Church. Who is this Seer who has been speaking to us and unfolding the hidden things of the Kingdom for us? What manner of man was he? The

answer to our question must be sought in the Book itself.

It is not, I take it, that the question we ask has to do with the mere authorship of the Book. It is the mind of the Seer that we would know more about, his life, his experiences, his temper, his soul.

Scholarship is divided in its opinion as to who this John was whom we have called the Seer. There are certain radicals who hold that the Fourth Gospel, the Epistles of John, and the Apocalypse all belong to the same school, and none of them can be accredited to the Apostle John. Perhaps John the Presbyter wrote the Gospel and some of his followers indited the other Scriptures. An increasing number of scholars lean to the opinion that the traditional view is right, namely, that John the Apostle gave the Church

all three of the writings. Any one can easily look up the facts that justify this conclusion in Swete's commentary, or in any one of a number of able commentaries. I am persuaded, as I have already said, that we have in the Apocalypse "the same breadth of view, the same easy grasp of both great and subtle spiritual truths, the same gift of insight, the same moral poignancy, the same self-suppression, the same spirit of awe combined with spiritual audacity" as are found in the Fourth Gospel. What is true of the Apocalypse and the Gospel is also true of the Epistles. So it would be fair, from my point of view, to look to both the Gospel and the Epistles for help in answering our question. But it will be better to confine our study to the Book, and to keep in mind that we are not concerned primarily to answer

the questions: Did the same man write both the Apocalypse and the Gospel? Was he an Apostle? Was he the Apostle John? These are interesting and important questions. And as I have said, I, personally, hold to the Johannine authorship of all these writings. My desire is, however, to study a little more closely than we have yet done the mind of the Seer. This will help us the better to understand and appreciate his message.

II.

A careful reading of the Book leads one to feel that its author was a man of unusual native capacity, who had had the best of educational advantages, and who had had laid upon him grave responsibilities. Alexander Whyte in his brief but excellent characterization of the Apostle John, in one of his volumes on

"Bible Characters," has seized upon John's gift of imagination, his ability to think steadily or meditate, and his capacity for loving as his chief and distinctive characteristics. The Seer may be characterized in the same way as to his native abilities. But as one reads the Book one is also aware of the varied influences that have shaped these native abilities. The Seer again and again makes allusions that show how deeply he had been influenced by the life of the Master. He has felt the majesty of Christ; and Calvary has left a profound effect upon his mind. I can not but mention again the Seer's reference to the false prophets calling down fire from heaven. It seems certain to me that this is a subtle allusion to the time when the Seer himself wanted to call fire down from heaven and the Master reproved

him. He has come to know better now. Only false prophets resort to such means. Besides the influence of Christ upon the Seer may be seen the effects of his pastoral labors, and also of his exile. I need not dwell upon these things.

In like manner it is not difficult to trace some of the effects of his task upon the mind of the Seer.

Let us now look at some outstanding features of the Seer's mind as revealed in the Book, without adhering closely to the distinctions I have indicated.

III.

In the chapter on the Book some facts brought out may be referred to again as revealing the mind of the Seer. We touched there upon the infinite perspective of the Book, its vast canvas, its musical effects, its sublime symbolism,

its scenery. But these characteristics speak of a mind with a rare gift of imagination. The Seer really saw. He saw the unseen and unseeable in symbols often. Yet he saw civilization contemporary to himself as in a picture. He saw Rome as Rome actually was, trading in everything even to "the souls of men." He saw the sprawling, brutal, materialistic civilization of his day as a huge beast. It took spiritual and artistic genius to conceive Rome under the image of a beast. He saw Rome also as a harlot, and the image is scarcely less inspired in its fitness to the actual facts. He saw the Holy City also, and no one has come at all close to the Seer in his power to make great spiritual conceptions stand before us, sharply and accurately drawn, yet with a marked elusiveness and, after all, if I may put it so, unpicturableness.

Sublime as the picture of the Son of Man is, it could not be painted unless we were to take the sword out of His mouth; and then it would seem too martial a figure. Still, we make the interpretation easily, because we know what the sword stands for; and it can not be said that it mars the figure. It does say to us, this whole figure of the Son of Man, that the Seer was a seer rather than an artist or mere symbolist. He was seizing upon the secret of the Kingdom's spread; and in large part, that is by the foolishness of preaching. By the patience of the saints, dying but not yielding, and by the power of the Spirit; but also by the foolishness of preaching the Kingdom goes forward. Thus the Kingdom began in power, for "In the beginning was the Word." Now, this making of pictures, which are celestially beautiful and won-

derfully enthralling, and yet withal unpicturable, reveals a mind highly imaginative at the same time that it is amazingly penetrative, and gifted with spiritual clairvoyance. Another illustration akin to the Son of Man is the picture of the city whose height and length and breadth are equal. It will not make a picture as it is; and yet it does picture forth subtle spiritual aspects of the society of Jesus, which is heaven-inspired.

We at once feel the wealth of the Seer's imagination, and marvel at his scenic effects: at the stars falling from heaven, at angels striding land and sea, standing in the sun, flashing in gold apparel gloriously across the fields of history, at thrones resplendent, at cities flaming out to ashes in the unquenchable fires of their own lusts, at the unnumbered multitudes in white robes standing on

the gold pavements of heaven. Neither Bunyan nor Dante can equal the Seer in picturing forth spiritual truth. One marvels at each fresh reading of the Book: at its silences, at its thunders, at its storms, at the peaceful heart at the center of the storm, at the armies that tramp before us, and at the hail, rain, pestilence, fires, martyrs, heavenly companies that crowd its fascinating pages. No interpreter has ever added to these values. Every one who attempts to speak of the way the Book impresses him in this particular, feels, when he is through, that he somehow has marred the subtle beauty of the Book. Here is the artist, the poet, the dramatist! Here is imagination, great, magnificent, sublime, chastened!

Every reader notes this, and the pity is that we to-day can not, in the very

nature of the case, appreciate this as fully as the first readers of the Book must have appreciated it, and that for the simple reason that first of all we have to decipher his meaning because the world to which he alludes so often, that old, hard, Roman world, with the lust of it, has forever passed away!

Yet more significant than this picture, these scenic effects, the color and music of the Book, are the profound spiritual insight and the large, easy spiritual grasp characteristic of it. This again reveals the mind of the Seer. These qualities I have tried to bring out as we have read the Book. The Seer's mastery of the vision of Christ, his understanding of the mission of the Church, his insight into the nature of the ultimate reality, his confident optimism, his great capacity for faith, his infinite patience, his fierce

hatred of sin, his gentleness and tenderness evidently born of a long ministry in the preaching of the Word and the care of the Churches, his fidelity, his unflinching courage! Let no one think that these are extravagant characterizations. The truth is, the Book of Revelation has not in all these nineteen hundred years come into its own. We are only beginning to realize the spiritual wealth concealed in its pages and symbols. We have not been willing to have it speak to us. It is, I maintain, more a Book of great ideas than of wonderful pictures; for it speaks the great Christian words: God, the sacrificial love; Christ, the redeeming grace; the Church, the mighty witness; the Kingdom, a spirit of life, cleansing and uplifting, a civilization where the souls of men shall have opportunity and enlargement and noble fellow-

ship. The great truths, righteousness, retribution, redemption: how they live before us in this Book!

Now, these ideas reveal the mind and heart, the power, the greatness, the simplicity of the Seer. They speak to us of a mind of rare native ability. They speak to us also of a great heart. And above all (and the same is true of the Fourth Gospel) they speak to us of the influence of Jesus. I have been glancing again over the table of contents of that noble book by George Findlay—"Fellowship in the Life Eternal, An Exposition of the Epistles of St. John"—and I note that the Epistles bring out many of these same traits, and show not only the native quality of John's life, but the influence of Jesus. Professor Findlay's chapter titles are interesting: "The Manifested Life," "Fellowship in the Light of

God," "The Advocate and the Propitiation," "The True Knowledge of God," "The Love that Perishes," "The Last Hour," "The Inadmissibility of Sin," "The Conquering Faith," "The Eternal Life," and "The Sin unto Death." These chapter titles, which read out the meaning of the Epistles, are surely consonant with the Book, and reveal the mind of the Seer, a mind rich toward God in its very constitution, and trained in the school of Christ.

IV.

We are wont to ascribe large place to Paul in the founding of Christianity, and we should. I do not believe it is possible to overestimate his importance to the Cause either at the beginning or continuously. But I am equally certain that it is an easy thing for us to fail to see the importance of the service of John

by his gifts of the Epistles, the Apocalypse, and the Gospel. And if we think of him simply as the Seer whose personality gives unity and meaning to the Book, this still is true, for as we read this Book we must be conscious of more than the prophet's vision and ideas. We must feel the prophet himself, a man of action, knowing the times, knowing men, knowing the heart of man, knowing the Master's secret, and because of his knowledge able the better to make his appeals more effective, and his leadership also. The Seer who speaks in the Book is no dreamer apart. He is an exiled leader who has suffered and suffers, yet directs the host from afar. The Book does reveal a vivid imagination, a dramatic instinct, great literary genius; it also speaks of a mind capable of meditation and quiet thinking and wide ranging

and of keen analytic power; but still more, the Book speaks of the indomitable will of a soul that has entered into the liberty wherewith Christ makes free. Frankly, I like those imperious words that seem to speak to some interpreters of a spirit of vengeance scarcely worthy of Christ. They do not convey that meaning to me. They speak to me of a soul passionately in earnest, full of an unswerving and intense devotion to the Cause; of a love that spews out lukewarm loyalty and calls for fiery hearts, burning with zeal for the Cause.

It is true, too, that the Seer never would have spoken so sternly about the time-servers and comfort-seekers and compromisers had he not earned the right so to speak by his own whole-hearted service. So we should read all such inexorable passages as reflecting the

practical work of the Seer in former days in the way of laying foundations and resisting the Beast.

This is an aspect of the Seer's life that should not be overlooked.

V.

I have already indicated that it is a misreading of the Book to make of it a harsh interpretation of Christianity, to think of the Christ here revealed as in striking contrast with the Christ of the Fourth Gospel, except that here we do see the regal aspect of Christ as the Church had need of that, and here we see the Christ of Glory and not the Christ of the Earthly Humiliation. Yet over the Book is the tenderness which is Christ's gift, and, as I have said, the author has been in the school of Calvary.

It is well to mark this. One of the

Seer's traits is a sweet and tender pity, albeit the martyr spirit flames up through the pitiful tenderness. This kind comes by toil and prayer and bloody sweat. We read the Book, and thus learn of the education its author had received both in the fellowship of Christ and in the service of Christ. Only one who had wrought laboriously and effectively could have spoken with so much authority. Only one who had ministered long could have known the Churches so intimately. Only one who had loved intensely could have chastened the Christian societies so unflinchingly. The letters in chapters two and three speak to us of the Churches and of the Glorious Presence. They also speak to us of a faithful ministry and an unceasing care of the Churches.

So, too, we read the Book between the lines, and hear the sea, and behold the

rocky shores where the exile waited, and from which he gazed out and up! The Book speaks of a mind that has suffered, a mind that has been purified by fire, of a heart sweet by faith, and a faith kept strong by prayer! Findlay says, "St. John kept a tranquil heart through a long lifetime of storm and stress." For he knew that "the world passeth away and the lust thereof," while "He that doeth the will of God abideth forever." The Book is full of storms, but it is not stormy. It is anchored, and its anchor holds. But this speaks of the Seer's inner life. He was not terrified by the Beast. His confidence was in God.

Alexander Whyte in his penetrating but brief characterization of John, already referred to, notes John's imagination, his gift of meditation, and his capacity for love. God said, "Let us make Zebedee's

son, and let us make him full of eyes within!" "John listened as none of them listened to all that his Master said, both in conversation and in debate and in discourse. John thought and thought continually on what he saw and heard." His was an "inward, meditating, brooding, imaginative, mystical, spiritual mind." "Plato had all that," but then Plato "had not John's privileges and opportunities." Paul had not had such privileges and opportunities, and Paul was a man of action, running everywhere with the good news. All of this is true. But above all, John was the Apostle of Love. The tradition of how the young men would carry the apostle into the Church at Ephesus when he could no longer walk, and of how he would say, "Little children, love one another," has been lovingly preserved by the Church

because it preserves the mind of John for all time.

Only a great lover could have written this Book which we have been reading together—a lover of truth, of righteousness, of men, of Christ, of God. Read the Book again and see if this is not so. Unconsciously this is reflected by the Seer in the treatment the heavenly messengers show him. It is seen in his weeping in heaven when it seems no one is able to open the seven-sealed book. But every word of the Apocalypse reveals an intense affection. Ramsay asks: "Who will set bounds to the growth of the human soul, when it is separated from all worldly relations and trammels, feeding on its own thoughts and the Divine Nature, and yet filled not with anxiety about its poor self, but with care, love, sympathy for those who have constituted

its charge. It was under these circumstances, by such fiery but refining influences, that the Son of Thunder grew to be the Apostle of Love. The Apostle of a Love so great that no suffering could overcome it. A love that reached out from the loneliness of its exile to the dark places of the earth, where men suffered and languished and died."

We read the Book and see love enthroned. "God is Love." We see this love reaching toward man in Christ Jesus, until men loved of God come to be able themselves to love, and the Divine Purpose reaches its goal in a society made up of those who love one another.

"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and every one that loveth hath been begotten of God and knoweth God . . . and His love is consummated in him."

These are the words of him who speaks of the City whose chief attraction is not gates of pearl, but the fellowship of the pure-in-heart whose delight is in seeing His face, who hath redeemed them and given them light and salvation. And this City coming down out of heaven is but another window through which we may look in upon the soul of the Seer who was the Apostle of Love.

VI.

And this Seer of the Book who blew a great trumpet call to battle for the Church of his time is in our day speaking to us anew through his Book and is helping us to see the majesty and glory of the Christ whose we are and whom we are trying to serve; and is helping us to see, as he helped the Christians of his

day to see, that the Cause with which we are identified is worthy of our best.

Verily, "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this Book and keep those things which are written therein; for the time is at hand."

Music 15